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AS SILVER IS TRIED.

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AS SILVER IS TRIED.

A Novel.

BY

M. E. KERMODE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



London:

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AS SILVER IS TRIED.

CHAPTER I.

AUNT PATTY had a sister older than herself, whom I must now introduce to the reader. She was a person of many whims and fancies, and an old maid ; probably because no man had ever been rash enough to propose to her. Being endowed with a comfortable and even ample income for one person, she had taken a house of her own in the neighbourhood of Oxford, where she dwelt in seclusion, no one having access to her except the particular doctor who happened at the time to be in favour. For Miss Sophia Grantham was a confirmed invalid, and the one excitement of her existence was the variety which she cultivated in her medical attendants. She had early displayed a tendency to delicacy and doses, and this peculiarity in the eldest of three promising daughters had caused the good mother much uneasiness. Of these three Mrs. Bowsted was the youngest. She and Aunt Patty had both

been remarkably pretty girls, but Sophia, the eldest, was plain. This circumstance had been deeply resented by that young person, as soon as she grew old enough to understand the importance of good looks; and she looked upon it as very unfair on the part of those answerable for her existence. Her younger sisters were blooming and fair; while she had a sallow complexion, and large, unattractive features. Her sisters were both remarkable for a peculiar sweetness of expression, which was almost as attractive as the beauty of their features; while she herself was endowed with sourness and severity of aspect, which was partly the result of an habitual indulgence of a repining temper.

Some people were wont to say of the eldest Miss Grantham, that she was ill-tempered because she was ugly. But then, she had been fractious from her babyhood, and yet had not developed into positive plainness till about the age of sixteen. Hence it must have been that the long indulgence of peevish discontent had taken effect upon her features. Other people observed of her that she was ugly because she was ill-tempered, and very likely they had a certain amount of truth on their side. However this might be, Miss Grantham had invariably, in her home life, exemplified the severe

qualities of pickle, rather than the sweeter influences of honey ; so that her younger sisters had always held her in dread, while her mother, poor soul, too weakly amiable to understand the judicious management of such a girl as Sophia, confined her efforts to an occasional and feeble remonstrance ; but invariably finding this ineffectual, she would, with a hopeless sigh, relapse into imbecility. Sophia soon perceived that her sisters absorbed all the admiration ; while she, poor wall-flower, was left to droop in the cold shade. This galled her grievously, and she laid it to the account of her lack of good looks ; for it never entered into her calculations that her uninviting manner had anything to do with the neglect she experienced. Being fertile in resource, she soon hit upon an expedient to indemnify herself for the want of pretty features, by cultivating grace and beauty of figure.

Her sisters, when very young, were both too plump for symmetry, and Sophia had sometimes heard it objected against them that this plumpness rather detracted from their perfections. Sophia herself had been intended by Nature for a plump woman, but she resolved that she would, in this instance, be too much for Nature.

It was about this period that Mr. Banting's

principles began to make such a noise ; and Sophia seized with avidity upon this ingenious method for reducing her "too, too solid" dimensions. She was not one to do things by halves, so she went in with so much earnestness for this fancy, that she horrified her poor mother. Vegetables, bread, everything sweet or fattening, was ruthlessly expunged from her bill of fare, and at every meal she would make her repast on meat only. She would manfully get through the amount prescribed by the book of rules, though sometimes it required a great deal of resolution. Still she would not swerve a hair's breadth from her instructions, and moreover insisted on having all her food weighed, in order that she might be certain of consuming the right quantity to a quarter of an ounce.

All this was dreadful to poor Mrs. Grantham, who, poor soul, held the old fashioned doctrine, that vegetables and milk were the more wholesome food for young, growing girls. She therefore contemplated with dread the probable results of such a masculine diet ; and was filled with trembling apprehension lest the manly attributes of beard and whiskers should, in course of time, make their appearance on Sophia's countenance ; as she considered that much beef was a powerful stimulant for such

facial adjuncts. Her sisters laughed at Sophia's new whim behind her back, but before her face they dared not even indulge in a harmless smile, lest the vials of her fury should be poured upon their heads.

Sophia probably laid the foundation of real future ill-health by her own follies, though as a girl her tendency to delicacy was quite imperceptible to any but herself. After a long perseverance in the reducing system, and finding that it signally failed in the desired effect of securing the admiration she coveted, this fertile young person hit upon a new expedient. Since she could not attract by the beauty of her countenance, nor by the symmetry of a sylph-like form, might she not succeed in being interesting by cultivating fragile health ?

This happy idea proved a resource to occupy her restless mind, not for a short time only, but, as will be seen, for the greater part of her life, when the delicacy, imaginary at first, became chronic. Having hit upon the notion that her digestion required peculiarly tender treatment, she took to a light vegetable diet, with the same ardour as she had before displayed when espousing the cause of mutton and beef ; and worried her mother perpetually to procure dainty things for her, which, when they came

to be served up, she would often declare she could not eat ; such was the feebleness of her digestive powers.

Poor Mrs. Grantham, driven to the verge of imbecility, was tormented with dread lest her daughter might end by refusing all food, and starving herself ; but this fear was lost sight of, after a time, in consternation at another fancy of this ingenious girl. She was seized suddenly with an unaccountable desire to analyze all the water she drank ; and as water had always been an important article of diet with her, inasmuch as she never could bring herself to take wine, or any stimulant, the trouble this new whim caused in the family was immense.

Sophia would discover that one kind of water contained too much lime, which would speedily prove injurious to her delicate interior. Another kind would be found to hold in solution some deleterious matter, which would prove little short of poison to one of her susceptible organization. At every meal she would have two or three kinds of the harmless fluid upon the table : rain water, spring water, mineral water ; and, as the fancy took her, she would imbibe one or other, and sometimes a little of each. Not seldom would she reject all three with a sigh of hopeless dissatisfaction, like one who

finds by bitter experience that all is vanity. After the water mania had begun to lose its hold, she was attacked with Homœopathy on the brain, accompanied with aggravated symptoms. This system recommended itself to her principally because, by expending a shilling, she could study all the ills that humanity suffers from ; and by comparing the symptoms therein detailed with those she imagined she detected in herself, she could enjoy the satisfaction of soaking her suffering anatomy in unlimited quantities of dissolved globules. From this period Sophia was rarely seen without her compendium of diseases and their remedies, either in her hand or in her pocket ; and no sooner did she detect the suggestion of a headache, or a finger ache, than out would come her little manual, and she would sit down to the diligent study of the same ; not venturing to apply remedies indiscriminately, but seeking to be informed how to proceed, in case what she suffered from was a "tearing headache," or a "racking headache," or a "sharp pain," or a "dull pain," or a "continued aching," or an "intermittent throbbing." In short, such amusement and occupation did her new fancy afford her, that poor Mrs. Grantham, released from perpetually rushing hither and thither to

procure what her daughter thought necessary for restoring her to health, actually found time to die in peace ; and passed away after a very short illness, leaving her two younger daughters comfortably married, and her eldest with a sufficient income to allow her to make herself happy in the indulgence of her innumerable fancies.

Sophia had felt extremely indignant with her two sisters for being so wanting in deference to herself as to get married, and leave her in the lurch. She quickly resolved on leaving the old home, having taken up the notion that the air of the place did not agree with her. Having opportunely fallen in with some acquaintances who were going abroad, she joined their party, and set out on a foreign tour ; but failed to find the benefit she expected, and returned home again, with health much the same, and an increased disposition to consider this world a vale of tears, and all people therein (especially medical men) vain-glorious and vexatious.

The accounts of his sister-in-law's woes, which arrived at Park Crescent from time to time, greatly tickled Uncle Rob, who had many a chuckle over the invalid's medical experiences.

"Serve her right," he would exclaim ; "she refused all sensible advice." Here he doubtless

referred to his own, which had been offered gratis, but indignantly rejected by Miss Grantham. "She will go her own way, and dabble in all sorts of systems, and the result will be chronic dyspepsia, or real nervous disease."

When last heard of at Park Crescent this amiable specimen of her sex had removed herself and her incurable maladies to a house in the neighbourhood of Oxford; and seemed resolved there to spend the remainder of her harassed existence. Growing weary after a time of utter loneliness,—for she denied herself to visitors on the ground that her nerves could not stand the slightest agitation,—the happy idea occurred to her of advertising for a lady to dwell with her as companion.

So she composed a very inviting paragraph, which she inserted in several newspapers which enjoyed the "largest circulation," and it came to pass that in a day or two she was overwhelmed with applicants, all representing themselves as persons of the highest accomplishments, and the most amiable dispositions. From these Miss Grantham selected the most promising, and flattered herself that now, at last, she had found an alleviation of all her troubles.

But there are some persons whom a relentless fate pursues with cruel malignity, and poor

Miss Grantham was, in her own opinion at least, one of them. The "young person" whom she had so distinguished as to select her from many applicants, proved so curiously impracticable and wrong-headed, that Miss Grantham was struck with horror to perceive the degeneracy of the rising generation. This misguided individual actually ventured to have an opinion of her own on one or two subjects; and insisted on going out for at least a few minutes every fine day, "to enjoy a little fresh air," as she expressed it.

Enjoy, indeed! What more exalted gratification could she enjoy, than that so freely bestowed on her, of being permitted to sit beside Miss Grantham, while she took her afternoon snooze; or to read to her during her waking moments such cheerful works as, "Every Man his own Doctor," and, "The Invalid's Companion?" Then again, she had every comfort and luxury, and shared all the advantages of a home. She partook of the same fare as her employer; and yet one day had the effrontery to complain that she found a piece of dried-up seed-cake was not sufficient for a meal; and that she would like something more sustaining than weak tea! These offences could not be overlooked without doing a great injury to

society generally ; and therefore Miss Grantham, acting from a stern sense of duty, and a tender regard for the young woman's highest interests, intimated to her, after a six months' trial, that her services were no longer required.

After this episode, the much-enduring spinster again advertised, and this time landed a fine specimen of a North-Country woman, with a nobly developed anatomy, and a very strong accent. This lady was also independent in her ideas, and she was further endowed with a powerful love of argument. For the sake of maintaining her own opinion, and demolishing that of her adversary, she would continue to talk for an hour at a time, mercilessly following up every advantage, and never quitting her point till she had (at least in her own opinion) vanquished her opponent. Miss Grantham was at first lost in astonishment to find any one audacious enough to differ from her, either in political or housekeeping matters ; then the variety for a time amused her a little. But her nerves were by this time growing very shaky indeed, and before long she found it vastly fatiguing to sustain an argument, especially with the mortifying certainty of being beaten in the end. She therefore tried the plan of cutting short the discussion, by inti-

inating that, though for a time she graciously allowed a difference of opinion, yet when she desired to put an end to the argument, by letting the subject drop, she expected an instantaneous concurrence. In this, however, she was disappointed, as the strong-minded North-Country lady was not one to relinquish her game till she had worried it to death. In fine, for several successive days she argued her unfortunate employer into a serious nervous attack; and, therefore, Miss Grantham felt that her duty to her own health compelled her to intimate a desire that the connection should be dissolved.

Finding, after the argumentative person had departed, that loneliness had become extremely irksome, Miss Grantham tried again; and this time hooked a young, pretty, coquettish-looking girl, who, having tried teaching as a governess, and found it make too great demands upon her patience, had made up her mind to enter upon an easier mode of life, by becoming companion to some amiable invalid lady, with plenty of money, who would treat her like a mother, and finally leave her a large legacy.

Miss Bell, for that was the pretty girl's name, was stricken with some awe and alarm when she was first introduced to the severe-looking spinster who was to personate her

amiable invalid. But trusting that behind a frowning exterior this unpromising lady might hide a loving heart, and an anxiety to execute a will in favour of herself, Miss Bell accepted the situation. To vary the monotony of her every-day life, which, to one of Miss Bell's lively temperament, soon became intolerable, this beautiful but flighty young person took to walking in the fields whenever she could escape from her employer's yoke, with a handsome cousin, who was a member of the University, and who found no difficulty in accomplishing, twice a week, the short walk from his college to within a few yards of his fair one's residence.

He had called in the first instance, but being repulsed by the severe maiden lady, who regarded the young and good-looking of the opposite sex as beings necessarily too depraved to be admitted under her roof, the gallant Oxonian was driven to despair and letter-writing, which speedily resulted in the before-mentioned pastime of walking in the meadows with his charmer, and viewing the young lambs, and other interesting objects of the country, in her society.

But oh! when Miss Grantham discovered the unparalleled duplicity of her dependent, when the enormity of which Miss Bell had been

guilty was conveyed to her ears by a sympathizing friend, who flattered herself she had nothing at heart but the young lady's good, what a withering tempest of wrath burst over the poor girl's head! In vain did she protest that she and her cousin had been brought up together, and therefore were just like brother and sister. Useless for her to declare that Hugh Brown was a good, kind-hearted lad, with a strong appreciation of the beauties of nature, and that he was giving her lessons in landscape painting. Miss Bell tumbled headlong into a well of unspeakable disgrace in Miss Grantham's eyes, who forthwith turned her out of doors, with all the majesty of outraged virtue.

Retribution, however, overtook the Inexorable One in the shape of her next venture. Finding that paid humanity was but a frail reed to lean upon, Miss Grantham determined to advertise for a lady of independent means, who would think it desirable to join housekeeping with a single lady of delicate health. It was some time before this advertisement elicited any response; but at last appeared a spare virgin, evidently of some antiquity, but in good preservation, who announced herself as a gifted authoress, blessed with a comfortable amount

of lucre; but who, in the exalted flights of an aspiring genius, could not descend to the meaner considerations of housekeeping, and would, therefore, be content to combine her income with that of another single lady, who would manage all such base and inferior matters, leaving her at leisure to cultivate the smiles of the Muses. Now, Miss Grantham flattered herself she would be indeed blessed. Here would be a fine intellect to consort with daily, who might perhaps sometimes be induced to read aloud portions from her own works. No fear in this case of handsome cousins from Oxford daring to invade the sacred threshold with their profane footsteps; or to walk in the fields with the one who enjoyed the distinction of being her own intimate companion. Certainly, the aspect of Miss Euphemia Blusocks was far from being calculated to inspire romantic affection in the bosoms of Oxford or other students. She was of a towering height, but severely spare, as if she scorned to possess an ounce too much of anything so material as flesh. Her head was characterized by a striking absence of hair; that adornment being represented in Miss Euphemia's case by an attenuated knot at the back, and one lean twist on either side. Eyes brim-full of learning gleamed

malignantly through double blue spectacles ; and, to crown all, she was usually armed with a musty folio, or a quire of blank foolscap in one hand, and a gross of quill pens in the other. Miss Blusocks, like the fabled Gorgon's Head, seemed intended by Nature for the purpose of striking beholders into stone. She was a woman of masculine mind, and had no idea of knocking under to a feebler sister, such as she soon discovered Miss Grantham to be. She was determined that, though there might be two people, there should only be one mistress ; and that one herself. Her superior intellect soon overpowered the weaker mind of her opponent ; and Miss Grantham, though all unaccustomed to playing second fiddle, was reluctantly compelled to content herself with performing on that ignominious instrument, so long as it should suit Miss Blusock's literary views to remain at Rosemary Lodge. But that lady, having found a very snug, and in every way convenient retreat, wherein to evolve ideas for the enlightenment of posterity, was in no haste to look out for " fresh fields and pastures new ;" and Miss Grantham fell, in the course of time, so completely under her iron rule that she was compelled to accept her fate, and make the best of the inevitable.

Aunt Patty wrote at the time of Mr. Bowsted's death, to furnish her sister with full particulars ; and she had spoken of her intention to take the orphan girls home with her, and adopt them as her own daughters. Hereupon Miss Grantham was highly indignant. What ! take such an important step concerning the disposal of her nieces, without consulting her ; and the youngest girl her own god-daughter too, and named after her ? This was too much ! Patty had taken undue authority upon herself. But she should be made to know that her eldest sister was not one to be set aside in family matters. She would consider the subject, and would very likely think it necessary to insist upon some alteration in the arrangement.

CHAPTER II.

ONCE more the dusky, murky city. As Bessie put her head out of the cab window, while they rattled along the noisy ways towards the well-known No. 13, Brewster Street, and the conviction smote upon her that this was to be her home, the scene perhaps of all her coming life, her heart sank.

Oh, the confining atmosphere of the streets, after dwelling amidst country sights and sounds! The sweet, breezy, odorous country!

Bessie was liable to fits of intense excitement, which required the most careful self-control. At such times she felt as if the keenness of her grief would kill her; or as if the exquisiteness of enjoyment were too much to bear. She dared not give her emotions the rein at such periods, and generally she found

it necessary to try and divert her thoughts into some new channel. She recognized this necessity now ; for she was trembling with the excitement of overwrought feeling, and she feared lest it should find vent in some startling manner. The effort she was compelled to make caused her, unconsciously, to squeeze Brandon's hand with a sudden force vastly alarming to that gentleman, who had been leaning back in profound and pleasing meditation. "Bess!" he cried, roused into a spasmodic ejaculation; "what in the world are you smashing my bones for?" She laughed, with a sort of hysterical gasp; and her voice sounded strangely to herself. But Brandon heeded it not. He had quickly sunk back into his own musings, which filled his eyes with a glad light, and curved his lips with a happy, exultant smile. Though sitting side by side, how wide apart at that moment were the mental conditions of brother and sister! And Tots, too, was silent. Strange for her to be plunged in self-communing. Yet the circumstances in which she found herself, irresistibly suggested to her a comparison with those which she had thought so delightful on her first introduction to town life. Then her mind had been all happy ex-

citement. The novelty of everything round her had then filled her with childish wonder. Now, she disdained the idea of falling into raptures over gas-lamps and shop-windows. Well, she had been a mere child then; and, mewed up in the country all her previous life, she had naturally known nothing of how things looked outside of her narrow circle. What hopes and prospects of which she had never dreamed, had filled her since then. She knew something of the world now. She had found out also her own market value as it were. Then, she had revelled in a happy ignorance of the effect she might produce on the eyes and minds of others. A blissful unconsciousness of self had added a child-like charm to her pretty face and winning ways. Now things were different. She had expanded into a woman, and had entered upon life in earnest. Poor Tots! Had she gained by the exchange? She thought so at least. So she mused, as the poor cab-horse plunged along its way, and was at last reined up suddenly at No. 13.

"Hallo!" cried Brand, "how quick we have been!" But to Bessie it had seemed a weary long time. She stepped out, resolute in soul, though tired and trembling in body.

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"Hallo, little woman!" exclaimed Brand, seeing her fatigue. "Here, lean on my arm." He supported her into the house with a gentle strength that soothed her. Into the familiar sitting-room he half carried her, and placed her on the sofa, where the light fell full upon her pale features.

"Why," he exclaimed, extremely concerned, "you are as white as a pocket-handkerchief. You must be tired out, poor child. Dear me, what fragile creatures women are! You have not travelled very far, and yet here you are, ready to collapse."

Bessie looked up at him with a brave smile, and dispelled his anxiety by a cheery answer. Ah, if her physical strength had been equal to the strength of her character, she, the pale, worn girl, would have stood there, the stronger of the two.

Certainly those days were the reverse of happy to Bessie. Sometimes she fancied that she had had her portion of good things; and that now only the bitter and melancholy experiences of life were stored up for her. But even if that were so, she would say to herself, that her share of enjoyment had been a long one. No sorrow had ever approached

her, save that of her mother's death, until this last one, the loss of her father.

And—yes,—there was another pain, which lay close at her heart. A consciousness as of an irremediable loss, the heavier to bear because unacknowledged. Bessie had resolved that she would give way to no vain regrets. She had permitted a foolish idea to take possession of her thoughts, a groundless fancy that to one other she was not as all other women. But she had seen the folly of it. During his visit to Wareham had she not seen very plainly that she had deceived herself strangely in fancying that he had any feeling warmer than friendship for her? She had striven to accept the bitter truth, and from that time had done all in her power to banish his too dear image from her thoughts.

“Good gracious, Bess! This is appallingly slow!” Tots exclaimed, as she stood at the window one wet morning, a few days after their arrival. Certainly the prospect without doors was anything but cheering. A drizzling, misty rain wrapped the street and the opposite row of houses in an impenetrable fog, and dripped in large drops off the spare branches of the dejected shrub in front of the window. The poor thing had made a laudable

effort to put forth leaves as Nature had intended it should do; but with all its struggles, it had only achieved a few scanty brown tufts here and there. It looked sadly forlorn, as Tots's disgusted eyes fell upon it, and she longed to tear it out by the roots, and fling it away, for looking so miserable. She had no sympathy with its efforts to do its best under adverse circumstances; she only thought it looked so ugly, that it did not deserve to live. Tots hated a wet day of all things, for she never cared to set herself to any indoor occupation and steadily pursue the same for any length of time. She would practise a little; jump up and run to the window, for a fresh grumble at the wet; get out her letter-case, find she had no nice pen, that her paper was finished and her envelopes too; finally, lose patience, and declare letter-writing a bore. She had numerous pieces of fancy work, in different stages of progress; but bade fair to bequeath the finishing of them, one and all, as a legacy to future generations. On this morning, she had been particularly restless; and, after plaguing the cat within an inch of its life, and overhauling Brand's bookshelf, where she found nothing but works far too strong for her mental diges-

tion, she had in despair taken up her station in the window, and there managed for a while to amuse herself with watching the much-enduring mamma in the house opposite struggling to persuade a refractory infant to vouchsafe to go to sleep. When the baby at last succumbed to blandishments, and the mother sat down restfully with it in her arms, there was an end of all excitement in that quarter; and then Tots turned round with an exclamation of impatience. "My goodness, Bess!" she cried, "you sit scribbling there like the contented old maid you are, and leave me to amuse myself in this dull hole! Do, for Charity's sake, put away your everlasting writing, and say or do something."

Tots's doleful, dissatisfied face hardly seemed as if it belonged to the brilliant and animated girl who was always so fascinating in society. But, unfortunately for those she lived with, this young person was apt to keep her sweetest smiles for company; apparently thinking that frowns and pouts were good enough for every-day wear.

Bessie's letters were not of immense importance, so, in the hope of enlivening Tots a little, she put them away, and proposed a

good practice of a new duet which Saunders had sent while they were staying in Wareham; but whose beauties they had only just discovered. Brand—kind, thoughtful fellow,—anxious that his sisters should find no lack of amusement, had hired a piano in readiness for their arrival, and had thus given them both a surprise. He was fond of listening to music, but quite innocent of a capacity for producing any himself; nevertheless it was a great satisfaction to him, after a day's work, to lie on the sofa and hear the girls singing duets. He was a bit of a critic too, and had a good ear, so that he proved an appreciative listener. Tots caught at Bessie's proposal, and flew upstairs to rummage for the music, which, as was usual with all her belongings, was missing at the very moment it was wanted. She found it at last, after upsetting everything of her own and her sister's; and they worked at it so hard, and became so interested, that the time flew rapidly, and Brand's footstep was heard before they fancied it could be near his time for coming in.

"Bless me!" cried Tots. "You don't say it is one o'clock! Why, how fast the morning has gone, to be sure! That was a capital thought of yours, Bess, to grind at

the duet. If I had not found something to do, I should have hung myself by the neck to the gaselier, and perished ignominiously from boredom and wet weather."

Then the master of the house entered, and ordered dinner, so Bessie's letters remained unwritten. In the afternoon, after Brand had rushed off as usual, having barely given himself time to swallow a couple of mouthfuls, and no time at all for digestion, the rain cleared off, and Bessie, anxious to keep Tots going at something, proposed a walk; but Tots frowned disdainfully, and demurred.

"There is nowhere to walk," she grumbled. "It is horrible in the streets, where, among such a multitude of people, there is absolutely no one to recognize. I declare there is nothing so stupid as living in a town where one knows nobody, and is one's self unknown."

"That is sad for the citizens, certainly," said Bessie; "but we are by no means bound to walk in the streets. We can turn down the road, and get into the field-path leading to the church."

"Fields!" cried her sister, in indignation, for even she had some relish for the sweet freshness of their old home. "You wish to

mock a poor wretch, talking of fields and field-paths in such a place as this! What do you call a field? A patch of miserable brown turf, with a cindery lane through it, and a puddle of dirty water at the end! You, at least, ought to know better than to speak of fields in the same breath with such mockeries!"

"Well," said Bessie, "there is the Park a few steps down the road. We can turn in there, and perhaps regale our eyes with the sight of a sparrow or two."

"Very well," replied Tots; "since better may not be, we will go into the Park; though a more dreary, forsaken-looking place I never beheld, and I wonder you can find any enjoyment in it."

The young lady was evidently not to be pleased; but to the Park, as the least objectionable locality, they turned their steps.

Bessie sniffed the fresh cool air with great satisfaction after a long morning in the house, and in her estimation, even the forlorn-looking place called the Park was not so bad. True, it was in course of making, and only partially laid out, and looked woefully void of either shrubs or grass, or anything suggestive of the country. Never-

theless Bessie, with the knowledge that it was the best she was likely to have for perhaps years to come, resolved, though with a little heartache, to make the best of it.

"There is a great deal in imagination," she thought. "If I could but persuade my fancy that my foot is on my 'native heath,' &c., I could enjoy this barren waste, I suppose, as much as the old moors."

She was in the midst of trying to deceive herself thus, when she was roused out of her abstraction by the unmerciful Tots.

"Upon my word, Bess!" she exclaimed, in an aggressive voice, as if she longed to scratch somebody, but refrained, in consequence of there being nobody worth scratching, "you are enough to drive one into a moping melancholy! There you march along, with your nose in the air, and your eyes miles away; while your horrid boots are flopping into all the puddles, and splashing me from head to foot."

Bessie found, indeed, on contemplating her offending feet, that they bore marks of a recent and severe engagement with the surrounding mud, since she had taken little pains to pick her steps, while her brain, as was frequently the case, was wool-gathering.

She apologized humbly ; but Tots was not to be mollified.

“ One might as well walk with a milliner’s block, as with you,” she continued, in the tone of one injured beyond all possibility of pacification. “ You stalk along beside one, as silent as if you had made a vow never to speak again till the crack of doom ! ”

“ I’ll talk if you like,” said Bessie, laughing at Tots’ exaggeration of her grievances ; “ but as you said nothing, I thought perhaps you had nothing to say.”

“ How can one say anything to a mere perambulating machine ? ” answered Tots. “ Such a companion does not encourage conversation.”

“ Sound for the assault ! ” said Bessie, resolved not to lose patience. “ I am ready to do my share.”

“ Yes, so you say,” Tots grumbled again ; “ but I daresay, if I begin to talk, I shall presently find you oblivious of everything, as usual, and floundering into the biggest puddles as before.”

Then Tots found that it was really horrid walking on such a sloppy day. She was splashed all over. Her new skirt too ! Really, towns were abominable places ! For

her part, it should be long before she troubled one again with her presence. Bessie was growing irritated, but was withheld from retorting by the recollection that it was all for her sake that Tots was undergoing such unmitigated anguish. If it had not been for the idea of cheering Bessie for the first month or two of her new home, the suffering Tots might have gone straight to Wareham, and been at that moment enjoying herself in her own peculiar manner. Therefore Bessie, pondering these things, strove to be patient, saying to herself, "Tots is so young, one can't expect her to be serene under difficulties, like an older person."

Perhaps Bessie had some idea of herself as the serene older person; but if so, she often found that serenity was beyond her powers of attainment. That very afternoon, tired in body, and harassed in mind, she once or twice had much ado to repress some very sharp remarks which trembled on her tongue.

Tots was really very nagging. She should remember that these little worries were also trying to other people, and she should not add the burden of her discontent. But Bessie resolved that no harsh words on her part should create a coolness between her sister and herself.

Brand came home that evening in such rollicking spirits, that he soon effected a clearance of the atmosphere. He was evidently extremely happy in his own mind; and what is more contagious than cheerfulness? In the course of conversation, he let out in a by-the-bye sort of manner, that Basil Hyde had met him in the city, and had announced his intention of paying them a visit that evening.

Here, indeed, was a glimpse of bliss for Tots! Her eyes sparkled, and her tongue kept up a rapid fire of entertaining conversation after that bit of news. She looked animated and beautiful again. Bessie felt a little inclined to murmur, as she contrasted Tots's appearance and prospects with her own; but she speedily checked the inclination as unworthy.

Brand glanced at Bessie as he made the announcement of Basil Hyde's visit. Without being at all a match-maker (no man worth anything is), he had cherished a sort of unacknowledged hope that Basil and Bessie might come to like one another. It had first occurred to him when he noticed Basil's suppressed eagerness in inquiring for Bessie, after she had gone to Wareham. "There must be something up," he thought;

and smiled, well-pleased with the idea. He glanced at Bessie then, as he gave out his news, for it never came into his mind that Tots could feel any particular interest in the matter. But he was disappointed to observe no gladness sparkle in her face. On the contrary, a sort of pained look appeared there. He felt vexed, without asking himself why he should feel so; then he thoughtfully lit his pipe, while Tots hovered about, all smiles and good-nature; ready to hand him the lighted spill, or do anything to make him comfortable. Bessie took up her work, and sewed, in a very dead calm of outward quiet, but within, she was oppressed by a restless feeling, half hope, half dread. She should like to see him again, watch his mobile face, and hear him talk; but she knew she should undergo the pain of seeing his eyes follow Tots admiringly, and of beholding him smile upon her.

Meanwhile Brand smoked in silence, and felt a little bit cross with Bessie for being so unemonstrative. The well-known step approached at last, and the familiar knock sounded. Bessie could not forbear glancing at her sister. Tots was all radiance; her lips parted in expectation, her eyes full of gladness. Again Bessie

smothered a rebellious murmur, and met Basil Hyde with a calm, gentle greeting, as he extended his hand to her first. The conversation soon became brilliant, for no one could talk more gaily than Tots when she chose; and Basil shone even more than usual.

Bessie joined sometimes, whenever she could; but it was hard. She hailed a diversion in the shape of the evening post, and everybody jumped up and drew near the table, as a pile of letters was placed thereon.

"Dear me, what a queer handwriting!" cried Tots as she took up one addressed to her. "And you have a letter from the same person, Bess, with something plump inside; what can it be?"

"I know," said Bessie, "it is from Thirza. I asked her to write as soon as her wedding was over," and she tore open her letter.

"I declare!" cried Tots, who had no objection to the company sharing her news. "If the old soul is not going to Hull to live! She says her goodman is part owner of some trading vessel belonging to the Port. What a dingy, ropey, tarry place it must be! Does she tell you anything more, Bess?"

But Bessie had neither eyes nor ears for anybody just at that moment.

The plump thing inside her letter had proved to be a sprig of heath, which the good woman had enclosed, knowing well Bessie's passion for the moors, and all that grew thereon. Over that sprig of heath—now crushed and withered, yet calling up visions of home—poor Bessie was trembling and crying; her nerves, having been somewhat unstrung for the whole day, were now quite overwrought. The sudden rush of memory had carried her away back to the dear grey Parsonage; back to the old home life; back to the sunsets, the breezes, and the moors.

"Upon my word, Bess!" cried Tots, positively gasping with amazement, and also not a little disgusted to see her sister making such a spectacle of herself, "there must be a screw loose with you, I think! What on earth has the old body said to drive you into such a paroxysm?"

"Bessie!" said Brand, in a large, solemn voice, also a little indignant to find the usually calm Bessie capable of making a scene, "calm yourself."

She raised her head and looked at him, the tears still running down her cheeks; and in her look there was such a wistful entreaty for forbearance and sympathy that the kind lad felt instantly sorry for his attempted sternness.

"Forgive me," she said at last, her voice all broken and choked, "I must have seemed so silly."

She could say no more ; but, as if suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of the enormity of which she had been guilty, she turned abruptly from them and left the room. She ran upstairs and sat down to try to calm herself, in which she presently succeeded. But she returned to the sitting-room no more that night. She locked away the precious sprig of heather, however, and when Tots came up, after Basil Hyde's departure, expecting to find her sister in bed, she found her sitting with her face turned towards the window, through which streamed the rays of the full moon, seeming to shed some of its calm into her heart, and making her think of a happier region.

"Well, Bess !" was Tots's salutation, "you have made a pretty spectacle of yourself."

And then Bessie, suddenly recollecting that Basil Hyde had been present at the time, bowed her head on her hands in humiliation, and moaned to herself,—

"Oh ! what will he think of me ? What will he think of me ?"

CHAPTER III.

SOME days slowly passed, and Basil Hyde did not again appear. Bessie longed for him to come, in order that she might redeem herself by a more dignified demeanour in future. Thus, while she was wishing to obliterate from his recollection what she would not have him remember, the circumstance had already passed away from his mind. And in the intervals of business, when his thoughts reverted to the little party at No. 13, it was not with Bessie and her doings and sufferings that his mind busied itself. Round the glowing, brilliant image of Tots his fancies were woven, and his memory cherished the recollection of her smiles and not of her sister's tears. But Bessie did not know this, and if she had known, perhaps the knowledge would not have been very consoling. As the week drew to a close without any sign of Basil, her hopes centred on Saturday. In the days when she

had known him first he had always come on that day early in the evening. Brand used often to laugh at him, and ask him what he wanted with half-holidays, who had no need to stick to business unless he chose; who might be scouring all over the country any day of the week, with no difference to his income at the week's end.

"For me," Brand would say, "it is a different story. If I take a day's holiday I lose a day's pay, and then where am I?"

Poor Bessie! She dared not dwell on the memory of those evenings, for in proportion as she had enjoyed them at the time, she missed them, now they no more recurred. For her, then, had been those thousand little attentions which were now all for Tots, and Bessie had nothing left but memories to feed on. Yet it never occurred to her that Mr. Hyde was in any way to blame. He had liked her well enough certainly at one time, but that was before he had seen Tots. Tots was good-looking, while she was plain. Tots's manners were animated and attractive, while her own were quiet and reserved. How could any man be blamed for liking what was, or rather seemed, so lovable? For Bessie could not disguise from herself that her sister had, as it

were, two characters; one, all charm and sweetness, for company; the other, glumpy enough at times, for home use. Still Basil Hyde could not be aware of this. He only saw in her a pretty and fascinating girl. No, it was not Basil who deserved blame. It was herself; her heedless, unwary self. With what blind folly had she given away what was never required of her! Why had she not guarded with more care the avenues to her affections? They might have been still safe in her own keeping had she been more heedful.

Some such thoughts were present with her on that Saturday morning as she stood at the window looking out upon a prospect that was anything but cheerful. A thick fog prevailed, so thick that the railings only a few feet from the window were scarcely visible. Bessie held in her hand the sprig of heather, and gazed at it while the tears dropped slowly; and, brown and shrivelled as it was, she fancied she could detect the fresh, delicious odour of the moors yet lingering round it.

A timely interruption diverted the morbid current of her thoughts. Tots, who had been happily occupied all the morning in turning her travelling trunk inside out in order to get

at some lace wherewith she proposed to adorn the sleeves of her dress for evening wear, rushed in at this moment with something in her hand that looked like a large blank card.

"Here, Bess," she cried, "is something you will like to keep, I dare say. In fact I believe it is your private property. I had no idea I had it; I came upon it quite unexpectedly, carefully stuffed away in the sleeve of an old dressing-gown."

She dashed the card down upon the table, and, without waiting for an answer, ran upstairs again to return to her employment. Bessie approached the table mechanically and took up the square of white cardboard.

But as she turned to the other side her expression of indifference changed to one of pleasure. She held in her hand a water-colour view of the old grey Parsonage, with intensely green foliage surrounding it, and a vividly blue sky over all. It had been Brand's first attempt in water-colours; and Bessie well remembered the very day on which it was taken; and all the circumstances rushed back into her mind with the distinctness of yesterday.

By a natural association of ideas, the pic-

ture of the old home recalled her lately lost father ; and, quite unable to contend with the rising tide of grief, Bessie laid her arms on the table, and her head upon them, and wept.

“Hollo, Bess, little woman ! What is the matter ?”

So spoke Brand, his cheery voice breaking in suddenly upon her lonely grief. He had managed to leave work earlier than usual ; promising himself, if the rain cleared up, to take the girls to the picture-gallery, in the afternoon. Saturday afternoons were his own property, and he had always some little plan for the amusement and edification of his sisters, this being the only opportunity the week afforded him for going anywhere in their society.

“Bess ! you here alone, with the water-works turned on ? What is it all about ?”

She started, filled with self-reproach, to think that this was the second time she had so foolishly given way before him in whose presence she had resolved to wear a happy smile, whatever grief might secretly possess her, and who was now being troubled a second time by her unavailing and weak regrets.

"I have been silly enough," she said, "to cry over an old picture of the Parsonage, which you painted years ago. How stupid you must think me for giving way like this; but indeed I will behave more rationally for the future!"

She steadied her voice as she spoke, and dashed away the remains of her tears, resolved that Brand should never be troubled with the sight of them again. But he did not look vexed or contemptuous; neither did he exhort her to conduct herself more sensibly. He, too, picked up the picture, and gazed upon it long and earnestly. To him also, did the rudely executed sketch suggest memories of sunny hours, before life had begun in earnest, and when he had looked at the future as hopeful and glorious. But to a man emotion is unwelcome, and is generally flung aside with haste, as if the possessor were ashamed of showing it. Brand laid down the picture, sung out to Mrs. Wills to look sharp and bring dinner, and then, plunging his hands in his pockets, took to walking up and down the room, whistling a lively air. Bessie rose, and taking her picture, glided from the room, with a face pale but determined, and a resolution never again

to let her disposition to mope get the better of her.

She found Tots still on her knees, ramming heedlessly into her big trunk all sorts of miscellaneous articles, which she had tumbled out on the floor in her search. She saluted Bessie with a shout of glee.

"I have found such a treasure of Maltese lace, Bess! I mean to tack it inside the bell-sleeves of my evening dress. How ravishing it will look! O dear! I wish we weren't in horrid mourning."

Brand called to them excitedly; so down they ran, Bessie having dashed her face into cold water, to obliterate all traces of disquiet. They found the master of the house in a great fidget, already settling himself at the table, and declaring that all women were alike in disregard for punctuality, and that everything was cold. After the cravings of the inner man had been partly assuaged, he turned his thoughts upon the plan for the afternoon, and informed the girls that he had every intention of taking them to the Picture Gallery, if it should clear up in time. This was a delightful prospect to both of them; to Bessie, because she promised herself two hours among works of art; to Tots, because

she mentally arranged to put on a very killing hat, in case Basil Hyde might turn up unexpectedly somewhere.

But alas for the hopes and plans of poor mortals ! The feeble gleam of sunshine, which had shed a sickly glimmer over the furniture for a quarter of an hour, withdrew abruptly at the end of that period, and the rain, which had ceased awhile, renewed its efforts with more vigour than ever. Here was disappointment for all. Brand was inclined to be cross, for he cherished his weekly half-holiday, and loved to see the girls enjoy themselves. He frowned, fidgeted, objurgated the rain in no measured terms, walked up and down impatiently, whistled, and conducted himself generally like a disappointed man. But, finding at length that all hope of the weather clearing was at an end for that day, he made up his mind to take it philosophically, and make the best of it. A pipe soon soothed him into content ; and he settled into an arm-chair for a long afternoon's reading of a vastly dry-looking work, which, no doubt, had some bearing on the subject of his next lecture. The girls hoped as long as they could, but were obliged to relinquish the idea of going out at last ; and then poor Tots was

sufficiently put to it to find something to do. She was disposed to be very fractious, having lost a good opportunity of airing a new hat, and so attracting the attention of one who was frequently in her thoughts; and she was ready to be angry with the world in general, but with the weather in particular, for behaving itself in such an aggravating manner. Certainly, for any one who has few resources within doors, a wet day in lodgings is one of the most dreary situations imaginable; and Tots could not resign herself to such circumstances, without doing all she could to bring every one round her into the same unenviable state of mind as herself. She made Bessie half angry with her poutings and grumblings; seeming to look upon her sister as her natural enemy, and to be bent on aggravating her beyond endurance, because she had settled down to darn Brand's socks, and repair his gloves.

But Bessie took it all in good part, probably because her mind was otherwise occupied with calculating the chances of a visit from Basil, whom she half-hoped, half-feared, to see. As evening approached, Tots adorned her plump person with a pretty evening dress of transparent black and white material, with

hanging sleeves, graced with folds of soft white lace. She came down, appearing to such advantage, that even Brand gazed at her for a few moments in silent approval, while he puffed an elegant smoke-wreath round his head.

“Why, Tots !” he said, at last, “whom have you been dressing for ?” And even as he asked the question, a sudden illumination flashed into his mind.

He had not failed to notice Basil’s attentions to Tots ; but with a man’s tardiness in arriving at conclusions upon such matters, he had laid it down that this was a mere blind on the part of Hyde, to disguise his real preference for Bessie. The idea that he seriously preferred the younger sister smote on him now for the first time ; and the displeasure he felt at the discovery showed him what the plans were that he had been almost unconsciously cherishing. He laid down his book with the air of one not in cue for further reading, and sat looking at the fire with a knitted and thoughtful brow ; heeding not that no answer had been returned to his somewhat embarrassing question. Indeed, Tots felt so taken aback, by finding that Brand penetrated her motives, that she had

no reply ready at the moment, and was only too glad to escape so easily. Bessie had not changed her dress. She knew that no pains on her part would render her so charming as her sister, in Basil's eyes, and she was of too noble a disposition to entertain a thought of rivalry. If, by the future serenity and cheerfulness of her manner, she could induce him to forgive her for the folly he had witnessed, Bessie felt she could be content, even happy, or, at least, as much so as she thought she was ever likely to be.

Glancing at Brand, she observed his gravity but did not wonder at it; for variations of mood were frequent with him, whose temperament was apt to fall into extremes, and he would often yield to despondency without apparent cause. She made tea with a sinking heart, since it became apparent that Basil did not intend coming that night. He had always been punctual, and now it was long past his usual hour. It could not be the rain that kept him, for he had often come in worse weather. Whatever the cause might be, his non-appearance created disappointment at No. 13, and a silent party gathered round the table. Brand was thoughtful, even to abstraction. Bessie, after a vain attempt to

revive the conversation, resigned herself also to pensiveness, and Tots's lately happy face had clouded over into an expression of crossness and discontent. Brand was the first to rouse himself; and resolved to put aside for a time all unpleasant thoughts, he cried cheerily, "Now, girls, let's have some whist to enliven us all!"

Bessie placed the cards upon the table with alacrity, pleased to see Brand throw off his absent mood, and content to smother her own troubles in a game which she was trying to grow expert in for his sake. But Tots viewed the prospect of a quiet evening spent in playing cards with unqualified disgust, and settled herself to the game with the air of a person suffering under the sense of insult added to injury.

Brand was patient and kind to an extent which is rare, even in the kindest and most forbearing of brothers; but her clumsy mistakes and careless indifference provoked him at last, so that he threw down the cards with a disappointed gesture, saying in a tone of great vexation, "Put the cards away, Bess; it is an insult to apply the name of Whist to this sort of thing."

Bessie gathered them up slowly; while

Tots, snatching a Magazine from the bookshelf, stretched herself luxuriously on the sofa, as if she had done with a disagreeable duty, and was determined to enjoy herself for the rest of the evening.

It seemed, however, as if nothing was to her mind that night, for after a while she threw down the book and tried another. That also failing to afford her the satisfaction she sought, she got up and roved restlessly about the room, fidgeting with different things, and creating an uneasy sort of bustle, that Brand particularly disliked.

"I wish," he said, with a worried look, though his voice was gentle, "that you would get something to do, Tots. I hate to see a woman look desultory."

Tots retorted sulkily that she should do as she pleased, though she appeared to fail egregiously in finding the thing that it pleased her to do.

The entrance of Mrs. Wills with a tray was a relief to all, for it was the first really dull evening they had spent together. Tots very soon disappeared for the night, saying she was tired and would go to bed; and after she was gone, Bessie sighed with pleasure, for she promised herself the luxury of a good

long talk with Brand. He, on his part, seemed to have something special on his mind to say; for, after Tots had left, he got up and shut the door carefully, listening until the sound of her retreating footsteps had died away upon the stairs. Then he returned to his chair, and took up his pipe, motioning to Bessie to take her usual seat on the low chair beside him.

"Hyde has not been here to-night," he remarked profoundly, as he burnt his fingers in the vain attempt to light his "comforter" with a quarter-of-an-inch spill.

"No," said Bessie in a low tone.

This, however, was not what Brand had it on his mind to say, when he so carefully assured himself that they were alone.

"I can't understand what has come over Tots," he said at last, in a pained voice. "What has caused this extraordinary change in her, Bess? She has not been like herself lately."

"How do you mean?" said Bessie, hesitatingly, yet in her own mind knowing full well what he meant. "Don't you think she is looking as nice and well as usual?"

"Nice and well," he returned, his mouth curving contemptuously. "I mean nothing about her looks; they are sufficiently well,

better than ever, in fact. But her temper, Bess, and her character have completely changed for the worse, and within such a short time. When she first came here to stay, only six or eight months ago, she was a bright, happy girl, as good-humoured as the day was long, brimming over with high spirits and fun, delighted with all she saw, in fact, fresh, unaffected, and charming. Now she is like a different being. She has changed into a vain, frivolous creature, with a head full of nonsense and folly, and a heart empty of everything but desire of admiration. How is it? What sort of influences has she since been subjected to, which have operated so injuriously upon her? I declare it grieves me to the heart, and I am quite disappointed in her."

"You are too hard upon her," said Bessie, distressed to think that there was so much foundation for this unfavourable opinion. "Remember she is young yet. It is natural to girls of her age to like admiration, especially when they are pretty."

"Very young," he repeated impatiently; "that is a poor excuse to make for anybody! At nineteen a girl ought not to be too young to cultivate the graces that adorn a man's

home. I am sadly afraid she is growing selfish, and that all that gaiety she entered into at Wareham has turned her head." He paused and puffed away at his pipe, never heeding, in his pre-occupation, that it was no longer alight.

Bessie sat sorrowfully trying to persuade herself that Brand was too severe, as she passed in review the different stages of deterioration which her sister's temper had undergone within a few short months. She had an affectionate heart still; Tots always would have; but now, she never showed Bessie those little attentions and that sympathy which had once held the sisters so closely together. Lately, also, a new subject for reserve had sprung up between them, thrusting them still farther apart. A subject unacknowledged by either, as one that should be avoided by both; yet which none the less seemed to be opening a gulf between them. Bessie sighed heavily, and looking up found Brand regarding her steadfastly as he puffed away at his re-lighted pipe.

There was a questioning expression in his eyes, which speedily shaped itself into words, and he said earnestly, "Bess, you cannot fail to have noticed this change.

Just ask yourself whether you are in no way responsible for at least a part of it; tell me, did you, while you were together in Wareham, endeavour to check her in the follies which seem to have done her so much harm?"

Bessie flushed up, and looked at her brother with a startled face. She to blame! Could it be that she indeed might have helped to form her sister's character? And, as the thought of possible neglect forced itself upon her, large tears rolled unheeded down her face, and fell upon her clasped hands.

Brand could never stand a woman's tears, so he was pained at the sight of Bessie's sorrow. Laying down his pipe, he put his arm round her and kissed her.

"Don't cry, my dear child," he said; "it was cruel of me to reproach you so unjustly."

"Not unjustly," said Bessie, struggling to regain composure. "Indeed I am glad you spoke as you did, for I will try to be a better sister henceforth."

"You are the best sister in the world," he said affectionately; and he bade her sleep well that night, and not lay his foolish words to heart.

But when she was in her room, and stood

gazing at the sleeping face of her sister, her mind kept running on the old words, "Do noble deeds, not dream them all day long." "Alas!" she sadly thought, "I am for ever dreaming, but never doing. Henceforth, I *will* do, with all my might, and dream no more."

CHAPTER IV.

THOSE were very busy days for Brand. He had been promoted, and was now an Under-Secretary, with scarcely more salary, but occupying a more honourable and more arduous post. He would return home in the evening, with several pockets crammed with papers which he had not been able to complete during the day, and which had to be finished therefore at his lodgings, and taken back again next day. Being so incessantly occupied, both in this way, and in thinking out some grand design which he hoped to perfect some day, he had not much leisure to bestow on observing his sisters and their doings. He liked to feel that they were in the room with him, quietly working or reading, while his pen flew. He was conscious of their presence or absence, but he was obliged to leave them to themselves a good deal. He felt that they were both contented

and happy, since they always had smiles ready for him, whenever he had time to bestow any attention on them. All this time, Basil Hyde did not come again, and Bessie was longing for him.

Being absorbed, heart and soul, Brand was always cheerful, though his days were long and hard, and his holidays few. And Bessie, watching him swallow his hasty breakfast, and stride off to his morning's work, would wish many a time that a woman's life might but be as full of interest and excitement as a man's. Could it have been possible for her to have filled her days with occupations so absorbing, how different would it now be with her. How speedily would this foolish love be driven forth by the mighty influences of a lofty ambition and a strong will! But for a woman there are no such weapons wherewith to combat longings that consume her, and hopes which she too surely knows must be futile. "And yet he liked me once," she would muse, with a sigh; "me, and not Tots." But now it was only too apparent that his fancy had strayed from her to her sister.

Still his nature was not inconstant. In certain moments of compunctious visitings,

he would excuse himself by thinking that Bessie was very much to blame. She had striven so effectually to divert his thoughts from herself, that he was certainly not in fault for having taken her at her word, as it were. He felt his vanity wounded by Bessie's coolness, especially when he had taken the trouble to go after her to Wareham. He was unaccustomed to meet with such treatment. She had apparently scorned him, after accepting his attentions for some time with complacency. She therefore was in fault, and he was too proud to offer his love where it was despised. Besides, had she not left her brother's to go to Wareham, a day or two earlier than he had expected, and thereby deprived him of the opportunity he had coveted, for the purpose of ascertaining her feelings for him? Had not she, when he had put himself out of the way to invent business in Wareham on her account, received him coldly, and moreover done her best to repel him by a studied ill-appearance? So that Basil came to the conclusion that his attentions were distasteful to the object of them, and that—in fact, her younger sister was an uncommonly pretty little thing!

It will be seen from all this, that Basil was

not merely a blameless, but even an injured person, and that Bessie had displayed a variableness of disposition worthy of reprehension. And Bessie herself never blamed him. Basil inconstant! Basil selfish! The impossibility of his being anything but what was noble, appeared to her to be as patent to all the world as it was to herself. Ah, no. With herself the fault lay. It was not likely he would understand the cause of her coldness at Wareham, and yet she could not have acted otherwise. When she had perceived his captivation with Tots' fresh young beauty, how could he know the battle that had taken place in her inmost soul, between the passionate desire to win him for herself, and the feminine pride which would not let her move a finger to hold him back from loving another woman, if he were so minded.

Of all this, Tots knew nothing. She was happy, yet could hardly tell why. She had determined, half in fun, when she had first heard of this Basil Hyde, and suspected him to be Bessie's lover, that she would amuse herself with measuring her fascinations against her sister's, though without the slightest intention of being caught in the toils. It had grown pretty evident to her of

late that she had captivated him, and yet she would scarcely allow to herself that he loved her; much less that she cared for him. She had succeeded, however, in persuading herself that Bessie had never loved him, and did not want him; or if she did, she took so little pains to secure the prize, that she did not deserve to have it; therefore it would be lawfully her own, if she could succeed in gaining it. Certainly she had used none but the most innocent coquetries in order to attach her sister's admirer to herself; and even now, had Bessie given but a hint of the real state of her feelings, Tots would instantly have withdrawn from the field, horrified at the desolation she had unconsciously wrought. She would willingly have surrendered her position, well-nigh secured as it was, had she known how highly her sister valued the prize, of which she after all thought but lightly, as it was her nature to think of everything; for she was of a different sort of stuff from Bessie, and could have readily consoled herself with some new admirer, at this early stage. And as to Bessie, with all her sufferings, she was no coward. to sit with folded hands and make lament; nor was she one to join in the dreary

cry of deserted Mariana, "I would that I were dead!"

But lest her spirit should grow faint under the pressure, she would resolutely turn to some engrossing occupation. In these days of Brand's increased work, her eager spirit caught at another opening for busying brain and fingers. Could she not help him in all this mass of writing? One evening, as she sat wistfully watching the massive head, bent over piles of paper, and longing to ask him if she might be of use, Brand, uneasy under the consciousness of being watched closely, looked up, and, catching her eye, he laid down his pen suddenly, as if struck by a new thought.

"Don't you think I could help you?" she inquired, fearing lest he should answer her that such work was not for girls. But he did not. He chuckled and rubbed his hands, apparently well-pleased.

"The very thing I was thinking of," he said. "Great wits jump together, you see, Bess. If you can handle a pen, you might do a good deal of this, and we should have it all done earlier at night."

Bessie's eyes shone. Here was occupation for at least two hours every evening. She

settled herself in a chair, and chose a pen with much care. Brand glanced at her with a little sudden anxiety. She did look so very white, to be sure, and so much older all at once. What could have occasioned it? Surely she had nothing on her mind. At this juncture Bessie looked up, and, with the gladness of a new distraction from her troublesome thoughts beaming over her face, instantly dispelled all his new-born fears. "She is all right," he thought to himself. "I daresay town air makes her pale, but evidently she has nothing else bothering her." Then he proceeded to explain what her share of the labour was to be; and with a playful exhortation not to wear herself threadbare in his service, he once more plunged back into oblivion. Bessie dashed into a vortex of writing with feverish haste, as though she feared lest any delay might deprive her of courage to begin. For a time, nothing was heard but the rapid scratching of their pens; and Bessie had almost succeeded in losing all sense of her own identity, when—hark! A footstep on the pavement—a manly stride was heard approaching. Instantly Bessie was recalled to the old train of thought. No more would her pen form the words she de-

sired; her work seemed to flutter up and down before her; between herself and the paper, the image of a tall man, with penetrating grey eyes, would arise, and force her to behold nothing else. The step drew nearer; what curious hieroglyphics she was making, to be sure! She laid down her pen, and turned to look at Tots. She too had heard the step, in the silence of the little-frequented street, and had evidently recognized it. She lay back, snugly nestling in her arm-chair; her hands, with the embroidery they had been employed upon, lying together in her lap, half hidden by the flowing sleeves of delicate lace; her eyes eager and shining, her lips apart, her whole air expectant. Bessie's heart sank sadly. How beautiful her sister was, and how plain she thought herself! The step paused at the door, and was followed by the well-known knock. Bessie pushed her writing on one side, while her heart seemed to cease beating. She turned cold, even to the tips of her fingers. A voice in the hall, a shuffling of feet, and a pause outside. Brand dashed down his pen, and opened the door.

“Hallo, Hyde, old fellow! I thought you were lost!”

His big voice, cordial and hearty, was a welcome in itself. Basil said something, Bessie knew not what, though her attention was on the stretch. She knew that they were shaking hands, those two lads, as only Englishmen can shake, with a vigour that threatens instant dislocation to every bone in the upper portion of their framework. By the time Basil was well inside the room, Bessie had recovered her self-control, and she rose and held out her hand with a smile. He took it, but only for a moment, carelessly; his grey, searching eyes merely glanced at her, that was all, and then roved away to seek another face, not far off, with a dewy light in her beautiful eyes. Tots advanced, and greeted him, half shyly. Then they all subsided into chairs, at least, three of them did, but subsiding was much too calm and gradual a movement for Brand. He flung himself back in his chair, rubbed his hands complacently, and beamed round on the little party with a benign smile; and for a while his face was as jovial, as free from any shade of business or anxiety, as if he had never seen a business letter, much less been buried under a mountain of correspondence but a few moments before. Then he fired off

questions at Basil, and lay back, looking as if he were in charity with all the world, and had nothing to do but to enjoy himself. But alas! business must be attended to, though pleasure may allure to idleness; and so after a while Brand turned to the table again, explaining to Basil that he must excuse himself and Bessie from joining in the conversation for the next hour or so, since much work yet remained that must be finished; and exhorting Tots, meanwhile, to do her best to entertain their visitor, while they "wired into the correspondence," as Brand phrased it.

Then he bent his head to his work once more, completely banishing from his mind any recollection of the surroundings, for he possessed that happy faculty of concentration which renders one independent of outward things.

Bessie turned also, and took up her pen once more. She tried to write, but blots fell here and there, disfiguring the fair surface of the paper. No concentration was possible with her. Scarcely could she take in the sense of what was absolutely under her eyes. She glanced round at the two who were seated behind her. Their voices had sunk to low

tones. They sat close together, Tots in a lounging-chair, her eyes bent down upon the work lying in her lap, while her hands played with it in graceful idleness. Every now and then, however, she raised those bewitching eyes with a smile to the face above her own, and the eyes thereunto appertaining; for which just then no other object existed save that changing expression and those trifling hands. Yes, Basil was sitting close beside her, as close as he could bring a chair; and his attitude suggested the idea that he never would sit anywhere else by his own consent. Bessie turned again to the table, and once more began to write; and now she wrote busily, and looked round no more; and it seemed, as her pen flew along, that she had bade farewell for ever to all the beauty and sunshine of life. Now and then Tots and Basil glanced, as if to heighten their own agreeable sensations by contrast, at the two working bees, to one of whom this work was no honey-making, but a weary and unprofitable toil. But there was nothing very interesting in the view of two bending backs, presenting a remarkably practical and business-like appearance; so Basil and Tots soon looked away again, and at each other, and as there

was an absence of anything musical in the rapid scratching of two pens, they speedily resumed their own low-toned talk, after such short interruptions. Meanwhile the little clock on the chimney-piece ticked evenly, keeping the same time as it did the day before, and as it would the day after, though to the talking couple on the heights of bliss the speed of its movements seemed like the result of malignant magic, and, to one at least of the workers in the valley of labour, the fingers on its passive face crept onward, leaden-weighted, drawing out the sixty minutes into what seemed like sixty hours of painful feelings.

“What’s for supper, Miss Bowsted, if you please’m?”

All four started, and turning simultaneously towards the half-opened door, discerned a pale and pensive visage, to which doubtless appertained the voice which had propounded the momentous question. Now the matter of supper had completely slipped the memory of housekeeper Bessie; and therefore, when the subject was thus abruptly presented for her consideration, she was more disturbed than she would have cared to own. But she had not time to get her ideas in order before Tots jumped up, impelled by some coquettish im-

pulse to withdraw her presence awhile from her admirer, perhaps in order to inflict upon him a small dose of delicious misery.

"You are busy, Bess, I'll go," she said, and was gone before any remaining member of the party had time to ejaculate "Jack Robinson," or any other sentiment equally brief and pithy.

She was gone; and immediately, strange to say, it seemed to Mr. Hyde that the gas gave a very bad light, that the room had a dingy look, and that the evening had turned quite cold. He took up a book, but perceived nothing on its pages but the last sentence Tots had spoken to him, repeated over and over again. He put his hand in his pocket to feel for that comforter of man under all circumstances—his pipe—but withdrew it with the singular conviction that tobacco would have no flavour just then. Then he sat still, and looked at the two business-like backs and the two rapidly scratching pens: but he saw nothing of them, for were not the eyes of his mind fixed upon an object far more attractive than either of these?

Meanwhile that object was divided from him by a slight partition wall; and that object's mental anguish was mounting to a great

pitch as she discovered that there was nothing to eat in the house; and no remains of anything that could by any possibility be coaxed into the faintest ghost of a dish.

"But what is to be done?" she inquired of Mrs. Wills in tones which might have melted a stone into soup.

But that stricken individual only responded by a prolonged shake of that portion of her anatomy that served her for a head, and a despairing folding of the hands over—not her heart, but her apron. Mrs. Wills never could suggest anything. Bessie had gradually taken all the management out of her hands, and therefore she had come to depend entirely upon all arrangements being made for her.

Happy thought! Send Mrs. Wills for a pound of beef-steak, which she knew how to cook to perfection, and which was the very thing of all others that Brand preferred. Tots triumphantly announced this brilliant idea; but here an unexpected difficulty presented itself, Mrs. Wills was in doubt as to the propriety of "wampishing up and down the streets," as she expressed it, alone, so late at night. If there were any one else she could send now; perhaps Mr. Hyde would not

mind just running round the corner and fetching a pound or so of nice juicy steak !

Tots almost screamed at the bare suggestion ; she fell into paroxysms of laughter, then, consistently with her nature, she expressed an opinion that housekeeping was a horrid bore. At this juncture an unexpected auxiliary turned up in the shape of Mr. Wills, who came in at that moment ; and as soon as the difficulty was explained to him, in such simple terms as his "missus" judged suited to his comprehension, he agreed to accompany her himself, and support her through all the nameless dangers she was sure to encounter at that hour.

Tots drew a long breath of relief as soon as the back-door closed behind them, and then fell to musing in the middle of the kitchen floor. Beef-steak was all very well, but then it was only one dish, and would look shabby by itself : besides, it would certainly want something to make it go down. Brand would be desperately hungry after his hard work, and perhaps even Basil. (How she lingered over the name ; it was growing sweet to her !) Yes, they should have something good ; some really tasty little dish manufactured by herself—what should it be ? She would explore,

and find what the sacred precincts of the larder afforded in the way of potatoes.

Potatoes sliced and fried were excellent eating; Mrs. Wills had often done them so, and Brand had always said how good they were. Perhaps even Basil might like potatoes sliced and fried. She would do them herself. She thought she knew how; she must just take a frying-pan and butter it well, and slice the potatoes into it. There and then she rolled up her dainty sleeves to her elbows and betook herself into the tiny back kitchen, from the shelves in which, after some rummaging, she fished out a frying-pan of surprising dimensions. Now for a lump of butter! Oh! here was the butter—all right—they should see what a famous cook she could be. But, good gracious me! there was the sitting-room door opening, and—yes—his step coming—O ye gods! yes—coming into the kitchen! She popped her fuzzy, bewitching little head out of the back kitchen and beheld him standing in the middle of the floor, gazing round inquiringly with that eye-glass of his, looking, she felt, for her. Now, how could he know that she was in the kitchen alone? How could he tell that she had just sent out the landlord and his wife to fetch a pound of beef-steak?

She forgot that through the thin partition-wall her voice must have penetrated very plainly to the sitting-room; and that the exit of Mr. Wills and his "missus" by the back-door might be distinctly marked by any listening ears.

Good gracious! she thought, to be caught with her sleeves up to her elbows, and a frying-pan in one hand, and a lump of butter in the other! Here was an awkward situation. Her curls began to erect themselves with horror when the object of her alarm, having caught a glimpse of her curly head as it bobbed back again into the dimness of the back-kitchen, actually turned and made straight towards her, in this her undignified retirement. In another moment he was beside her, his tall head towering among tiers of saucepans, his long legs upsetting numerous trays, brushes, and kitchen gear generally. She looked up, intending to be angry and order him out, but somehow the absurdity of the situation dawned upon her, so that she bent down over the frying pan, to hide her laughing face. Then he bent down over her and laid his hand upon the very identical portion of the handle she was grasping, (though it was long enough, to be sure, for

him to have taken hold of it somewhere else), and he asked her in a mysterious and significant whisper, if he could do anything to help her, though there was not the slightest apparent occasion for whispering, since none were by to hear, save the saucepans and carpet-brooms. So she mischievously resolved that he *should* help her, since he seemed so anxious, and she sent him off foraging for a dish of potatoes, which she knew to be somewhere about, but could not explain where exactly. So he raised his head suddenly to look for the same, and hit it an undignified bang with the prominent handle of an inquisitive stew-pan; a blow which, under other circumstances would have been painful, but which at such a moment was simply bliss. He brought down a host of little boxes, containing candle-ends and various remains sacred to back-kitchens, while fishing about with his long arms for the particular dish he was in search of, and in sundry ways performed feats of surprising clumsiness. But at last he triumphantly placed beside the family frying-pan the very potatoes aforesaid. Then did the capricious mistress of his affections despatch this willing Slave of the Ring to the knife-box, directing him to furnish himself with a weapon there-

from, with the view of shredding the potatoes into elegant slices. Tots had by this time succeeded in melting into the frying-pan a sufficient quantity of butter to float a moderate tub, and then, had there been any lookers on, they would have beheld the spectacle of this very tall and stately young man, with a huge carving knife in one hand, and an infinitesimal potato in the other, carving the same in a gingerly manner, and letting the slices fall gracefully into the ocean of butter. His head was bent very low, because he was short-sighted, and required to have an object very near to his eyes; and besides, this brought his face on a level with the laughing girl, whose plump white hands supported the frying-pan; but this latter circumstance was a mere coincidence of course.

"Now I think this ought to be right!" said Tots complacently eyeing the result of their joint exertions with her head on one side. By this time they had succeeded in raising a pile of mutilated remains, which looked like an extinct volcano, with a sea of melted butter flowing calmly at its base.

"Somehow it looks a quantity of butter," remarked Tots, after a moment's profound

thought; "I really believe, do you know, we ought to have mashed the potatoes instead of slicing them; they would have soaked up the butter much better. Don't you think so?" Hereupon she looked up with a questioning, coquettish face, as if for information, and feeling assured that she was seeking it in the best possible place. But Basil seemed at this important juncture to have become suddenly bankrupt in ideas, on the subject of potatoes generally, and the desirability of mashing rather than slicing in particular; for instead of setting her anxious mind at rest on this question, he abruptly made a very surprising remark, and quite remote from the subject in hand. He said,—

"My darling!" And then he was seized with spasms of a very aggravated character, for he dropped the knife from the one hand and the potato he had been reducing to fragments from the other, and put both arms round his companion, holding her firmly, as if he thought her better worth holding, somehow, than cold potatoes. Tots was certainly taken by surprise; nevertheless she had the presence of mind not to make any noise. She felt that his fingers were clutching at the dainty pinned-up lace at her shoulder, and yet this

consideration, which would have caused her distress under other circumstances, somehow passed without exciting even a regret. And then he said something, and she said something ; but what it was she could not afterwards recall, except that as soon as he had made an end of saying the something, he had kissed her, and then had taken her mealy hands in one of his, and kissed them ; during which operations some fragments of the floury Murpheys established themselves in his whiskers, adorning his manly countenance in a striking and unusual manner, though of this fact he was quite unaware. But what says the greatest of poets concerning the course of true love ? So far it had run smoothly in this instance ; but now was suddenly heard a scuffle of feet at the back door, a hand on the latch, and a big voice outside uplifted in a pithy recommendation to some one to " look out ! "

The lovers sprang apart with very decided haste. Down went the knives and forks that had assisted at the consultation, the frying-pan, after making a dreadful clatter in the course of its hurried descent, lay on the flags dejected and prostrate, whilst a river of butter trickled slowly into the interstices in

the pavement, and the heap of fragmentary potatoes was scattered, as if with an eye to picturesque effect, in various directions. Tots flew upstairs, gasping and horror-struck lest Mrs. Wills should have beheld her in the act of usurping her functions; while Basil moved more slowly away from the back-kitchen regions, as thinking it did not become the dignity of man to flee with too much precipitation.

He vanished, however, as quickly as his native sense of dignity would permit; yet not so quickly, alas! but that a view of his disappearing coat-tails burst upon the astonished Mrs. Wills, when that estimable and long-suffering female entered upon the scene of these culinary exploits. She advanced a few paces, and then paused, struck well-nigh dumb with the scene which presented itself. As the scattered knives, the prone frying-pan, and the dissected potatoes broke upon her view, she uplifted her hands and ejaculated with much fervour, the monosyllabic sentiment, "Lor!" What further remarks she gave utterance to, and what were her conjectures as to the cause of the cyclone which had evidently raged among the utensils in her back-kitchen, have not been

handed down. However, a short time after, a savoury odour of fried beef-steak and potatoes penetrated to the sitting-room, where, in a lounging-chair, the hero of the foregoing thrilling adventures had deposited himself, looking as if nothing particular had happened within the last year or so. Then did Brand fling aside his pen, and push away from him the pile of letters, while he snuffed up the air, as if he found something remarkably relishing in the flavour of it. And Bessie too laid her pen away, and arose giddy and guilty of wishing that she was in bed, where she longed to bury her face in the pillows, and have a lonely little weep. Directly after, down came Tots, glowing, though with downcast eyes; her hands washed and her sleeves let down, and all traces of her cooking experiences obliterated. The fried potatoes which appeared on the table that evening were not those over the preparation of which such an immense amount of sentiment and butter had been lavished, but they were nevertheless very heartily enjoyed by at least two of the party; —the hungry male creatures, who are always ready to eat, let what will have taken place beforehand. And when the meal was ended,

Basil, looking mysteriously at his host, begged him to have a pipe with him outside, and take a turn or two up and down the pavement.

To this Brand readily assented, observing that the room certainly was hot, and having no doubt whatever that this was the reason which prompted his friend to wish for his evening pipe out of doors. After some fishing in the grimy depths of his cupboard, amongst glass-bottles, and many nameless objects, he fished out a smoking-cap, which probably at some remote period had displayed a braided design of a different colour from the ground-work, but which had turned gradually to a sort of universal neutral tint. With great deliberation he drew this from its retirement, and placed it on his head, blissfully unconscious of the fever of impatience which was all the while devouring his friend. Basil was burning with anxiety to get his explanation over, while Brand, totally unaware that there was any explanation pending between them, calmly rummaged for his pipe, which, by some unaccountable chance, was not to be found in its usual place on the chimney-piece. While he fished about, here and there, under books, and among piles of letters, without

the slightest appearance of hurry in any of his movements, Basil was becoming more impatient.

"Why could not the fellow look alive? Confound it!" he mentally ejaculated, and his expression meanwhile denoted anything rather than an amiable complacency. Then aloud,—

"Here is your pipe, man—come along!"

"Where?" said Brand looking round, and eyeing with much disapproval the pipe which Basil had snatched up from a corner of the shelf, and was presenting for his consideration. "No, that's not it; that thing's not fit to smoke."

"Well for goodness' sake find one that is fit to smoke then, and come along!"

"What is the use of being in such a deuce of a hurry?" responded his host. "For a calm fellow like you to be in such a fidget denotes something radically wrong somewhere."

"It is getting late—it is going to rain—I must be getting off," replied Basil incoherently, and uttering whatever came into his head, for the purpose of getting Brand under weigh.

"Here you are, then!" exclaimed that

gentleman triumphantly, fishing up the pipe of his affections from the depths of his pocket, where it had been lying all the while, and scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when his elbow was seized, and he felt himself being propelled along the passage and out of the house at a speed that took his breath away. When they were fairly outside the front door, Basil shut it, and shook it, to make sure that it was fast. And when they had emerged from the little gate, Basil carefully shut that also, and latched it, as if he feared that eavesdroppers might be lurking behind the green railings, ready to possess themselves of his most private secrets.

Brand eyed all these proceedings with an air of blank amazement. All this flutter was so foreign to the usual calm demeanour of his friend, that it suggested some powerful exciting cause; and when Basil joined him, after giving a final shake to the gate which threatened to uplift it from its foundations, Brand inquired with an appearance of anxious concern, "Is anything the matter?"

Now that the decisive moment had arrived for making his disclosure, Basil somehow seemed in no hurry to begin the subject. Indeed his first few remarks, made in a

spasmodic manner, as if he felt compelled to keep up the conversation in order to leave Brand no opportunity for questioning him more closely, were very far removed from the matter in contemplation. He observed that it was cold; and then, before his companion had time to assent to a proposition so obvious, Basil was seized with the spirit of speculation as to whether there was any probability of its being equally cold next day. Brand, however, being now wide awake to the fact that something was behind all this, cut it short impatiently, with a "Come, come, old fellow, this is not what you wanted to say; out with it, whatever it is. No bad news, I hope."

Then Basil, finding himself brought to bay, plunged at once into his subject; and very soon Brand was put in possession of the fact, that this friend beside him had suddenly arrived at the conclusion that he wanted a wife, and that the wife he wanted was no other than his, Brand's, younger sister. In very few words Basil explained his views; and, the disclosure once made, his old, undisturbed manner returned, and he lit his pipe and puffed thereat as if, having relieved his mind by discharging his duty, he had nothing

left to do but to take things easily. Brand's response to his friend's confidence came not immediately; and when it did come, it was perhaps of scarcely so satisfactory a nature as Basil felt he had a right to expect. In fact Brand, being quite taken by surprise, and completely thrown out in his calculations by what he had just heard, delivered himself, after a few moments of consideration, of the gratifying remark that he was "Blowed!"

Basil took his pipe from his lips, and treated his friend to a glance of haughty incredulity. He took it as somewhat of an insult, that a man should declare himself "blowed," in consequence of a desire on his own part to marry that man's sister. He flattered himself that his proposals were such as any man might be gratified to receive for his nearest female relative. His income was not only sufficient, but even handsome for so young a man; his position was unimpeachable, and he hoped he did not deceive himself when he considered that, on the whole, Nature had not been niggardly to him in the matter of personal endowment. And yet this man by his side had received the flattering disclosure of his intentions with the discouraging remark that he was "blowed!"

Basil felt injured, if not indignant, and smoked for a few moments in severe silence, awaiting an explanation. Meanwhile Brand was turning the matter over in his mind, and considering that there was no accounting for some men's tastes. He had thought Basil Hyde had too much sense to choose a wife only for her good looks, and therefore it was very surprising that such a sensible fellow should have made up his mind to take Tots, who, in Brand's estimation, had been designed by Nature purely for ornament, and who lacked the many good wearing qualities which Bessie possessed. Besides, he had almost unconsciously arranged that his dearest friend should marry his favourite sister; so that when his castle in the air—vague as it had been—was thus rudely thrown down, and when things had turned out so utterly different from what he had hoped, and so very surprisingly contrary to his preconceived notions of the manner in which they ought to have turned out, perhaps it will cease to be a matter of astonishment that Brand should, at the first shock of disappointment, feel and declare himself as above.

"Well, well!" he thought, "wiser men than Basil Hyde had made fools of themselves

in love, and so undoubtedly there was nothing to be done, but to make the best of it." Hence it came about that, before their pipes were smoked out, and before they paused again at the little iron gate, a perfect understanding had been arrived at between the friends; and Brand had wrought himself up to believe that perhaps it was for the best after all, as he could far more easily spare, and more readily give up, Tots than Bessie. So Basil, after a farewell look into Tots's eyes, which twinkled still with the memory of frying-pans and potatoes, betook himself to his house.

When the girls, leaving Brand to finish his smoke by himself, retired to their room that night, strangely enough they neither of them felt any inclination to talk. They had indulged in a good talk downstairs with their brother, before separating for the night, so it is to be supposed that their tongues had run themselves down. Brand thought it incumbent on him to bestow on Tots a dose of concentrated wisdom, for her future guidance, and with a fatherly air he informed her that he was satisfied with her choice—quite satisfied. Basil Hyde was a good fellow, a really sterling fellow; and would make a kind and

sensible husband. Notwithstanding all which, no marriage should take place under a year, with his consent. Tots would be better for a little training yet, before taking upon her the responsibilities of wifehood; besides, marriage was an important step, and plenty of time should always be allowed for consideration before entering upon it. He wound up an eloquent and paternal discourse with an observation which he had heard before somewhere, and desired Tots to lay to heart, viz. "Marry in haste and repent at leisure," and having thus admonished the bride elect, he puffed away for some time in silence.

Tots blushed a little indignantly at the idea of any preparatory training being required to fit her for becoming Basil's wife. It seemed to this misguided young woman, that it would require no especial talent to keep house comfortably on £800 a year, with the prospect of an annual increase of income. But she did not comprehend, foolish little butterfly that she was, that Brand's views regarding marriage were based on a much broader foundation than the mere absence of money difficulties. Had he explained to her all that he meant on the subject, Tots would

not have listened ; but Brand being a man of few words, and those to the purpose, cared not to enlarge on his text. And yet, when his thoughts diverged from the sister so soon to be taken from under his charge to become the property of another, and dwelt upon the image of another woman, whom he hoped at no very distant period to call his wife, he thought not of her as requiring any preparation of this sort, before she should be worthy of sharing life's joys and sorrows with him. Ah ! no ; all the qualities necessary to form a perfect woman were hers in the highest degree ; no improvement could be possible there. It was himself who seemed removed far, far, from her, by his own unworthiness. How could he ever deserve that such a woman should condescend to bless his fireside, and shed round him, a poor hard-working man, as he often called himself, the light of her presence ?

What Bessie had done for Basil in her thoughts, Brand had done for Florence in his imagination. He could only love what was pure and noble ; but then to his fancy this girl was all pure and noble. How little he knew, in those early days, that so far from being heights above him, she was not more

worthy of the pinnacle upon which his love had placed her, than a clay image is worthy of the marble pedestal upon which the sculptor has expended the efforts of his genius. Bessie had long ceased her futile endeavour to open his eyes to the real character of Florence Norcott. She knew that no more could be done, and therefore she must patiently abide the issue, earnestly hoping that the awakening from his dream might have no serious consequences. Indeed, her heart of late had been so much occupied with its own bitterness, that Brand's affairs had slipped somehow into a secondary place. This night, when she laid down her head, aching with suppressed grief, she longed intensely for sleep, that she might find at least temporary oblivion.

But sleep forsakes the sorrowful, and abides only with the happy. Her sister was happy, and she slumbered dreamlessly, the calmness of satisfied wishes, lending a still greater beauty to her features in repose than they possessed in waking moments. But Bessie tossed and moaned, and questioned and argued with herself. Why could she not put the image of this man from her? Even when for a few moments she did fall into

unconsciousness, she would shortly start up again, her lips ready to pronounce his name, fancying that she saw him near her, or heard him call her. Alas ! no ; all was darkness and loneliness ; a foreshadowing, she thought, of what her life must be henceforth. Still, as she tossed restlessly, some misty words kept ringing a sort of drowsy chime in her brain : “ Life, Death, and that vast For Ever ; one grand sweet song.”

Sweet song ! What a mockery was in the words. No sweet song for her, but a mournful wail, a cry of one groping in the dark, and yearning for a supporting arm and loving voice. Should she always feel thus, she wondered ? If there were any prospect of her life being a short one, it would be easier to bear it. But there seemed no reason, in the ordinary course of things, why she should not live to old age. Broken-hearted people always seemed to live a long time, she thought, and grow old and grey gradually, just as others whose hearts had never suffered any fracture. Broken-hearts seldom seemed to kill people ; she wondered why they didn't. Ah ! if life might end when happiness ended, how many would die an early death ! “ Not the enjoyment of pleasure, but the fulfilment of duty,

is the object of our existence here on earth." Where had she read those words? How distinctly they now flashed back on her memory, and what a new light they shed on the whole question! If this were truth, then how she had missed her way hitherto, in fancying that the sole end of life was to be blessed with the thing she most longed for. Yes, yes; she had been deceiving herself, absorbed in grasping after something to fill the cravings of her nature; while perhaps those cravings were not intended to be satisfied with a mere earthly affection. Ah! this new view of the matter, that these suddenly remembered words presented, how could it be otherwise than correct? For He who has bidden us take up our cross and follow Him plainly intimates in that command, that the enjoyment of earthly happiness is not the means best fitted to prepare His creatures for fulness of joy hereafter; but the patient carrying of that very Cross. And yet some people seemed to have all the happiness, while others had to bear a cross, and a heavy one, all their lives. Why, why should joy and sorrow be so unequally apportioned? All seemed misty to her overwrought brain. If there were only some one to whom she could

turn in this dreary time; some one whose loving counsels should strengthen her in the sore struggle. An intense longing for her mother now came over Bessie. She stretched out her arms in the dark, as though in the forlorn hope of finding some warm heart beating with sympathy. Then, over her troubled soul, breathed a sweet thought, bringing peace:—

“As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.”

And thus, at last, she slept.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT a flutter there was in the house at Park Crescent, when the news arrived of Tots's engagement. The dear auntie read the two letters—one from each of her chicks—over and over again alternately, and between each re-reading, found herself obliged to take off her spectacles, and wipe the mistiness away, which somehow would collect upon them so unaccountably.

“The dear child!” she cried for the hundredth time, “who would have thought it? And so very young too, dear girl! And Bessie seems so pleased and content about it—and she says Brand is more than satisfied. It seems altogether a very happy arrangement, and I am so glad for the dear child's sake, are not you, my dear?”

This, to Uncle Rob, who, in his favourite arm-chair, sat in his favourite attitude, with

his candle held up to his nose, between his dear old eyes and his pet book.

"Poor Joe Elwood, it is all up with him," replied the uncle, thus appealed to, and feeling it was expected of him to say something, though he was longing to be back, fathoms deep, in his "History of the Human Species." Aunt Patty glanced inquiringly, and with a little surprise, over the gold rims of her spectacles at her literary spouse.

"Why, my dear," she said, after a short pause, in order to digest the idea just presented to her; "you don't really think he was actually fond of Theodosia, do you?"

Uncle Rob took a peep at her, over the flame of the candle.

"Yes; it was rather a case of hearts and darts with him, I have good reason to believe," he said, with a mild chuckle; for somehow though Mr. Joseph Elwood was rather a favourite of his, yet he did not altogether dislike the idea of that promising young medical practitioner writhing under the torture of a barbed arrow stuck right through the left side of his waistcoat.

"Well, to be sure!" said Aunt Patty, taking off her spectacles, and wiping them

again, but doing it this time by way of outlet to her feelings, and not to increase their transparency. "Well, to be sure!" she repeated, as if the novelty of the situation rendered any other expression of feeling quite impossible. But as soon as Uncle Rob had once more buried himself in his subject, with the candle, as before, in alarming proximity to the end of his nose, she proceeded to exhume him by means of fresh questions. "When did you find that out, my dear?" she inquired with a woman's, and above all an aunt's, natural curiosity to discover all the details of any circumstances connected, even remotely, with the love affairs of her belongings.

Uncle Rob, being far gone in the consideration of the Human Species generally, was now quite beyond giving his valuable attention to the concerns of one human being in particular, and therefore replied only with a grunt. But Aunt Patty returned to the attack, approaching this time under cover of a question rather differently worded.

"Did Mr. Elwood say anything to you, my dear?" and she looked right through her spectacles at him, in order that her searching glance, concentrated into a focus, might

compel him to look up, and pay attention to her.

"You appear to interest yourself about this young man," he replied, chuckling inwardly, as was his wont whenever he indulged in a little conjugal teasing.

"I am interested about my niece, and all that concerns her," retorted she; "and if Mr. Elwood ever entertained any affection for her, of course I have a right to know it," and she looked haughty and majestic.

"Well, my dear, then he ought to have told you himself," said Uncle Rob, and immediately collapsed again; and sank to such a depth in his investigation of the Human Species, that Aunt Patty, with a sigh, saw it was useless to think of bringing him to the surface again, and relinquished the struggle.

From that day forward, this busy little woman was busier than ever, physically and mentally. What plans she did lay, and how nicely she would arrange matters for these happy young people. Tots's time to stay with Brandon had come to an end a few days' back, but she wrote to beg for another fortnight at No. 13. This had been granted with some reluctance by Aunt Patty, but at the end of that period she rigidly resolved

that she would permit no further extension of leave. She wanted to have her chick all to herself for a short time, that she might hear all about it from her own lips. Then, when they two had well talked the matter over, she would invite Basil Hyde to come and spend a week or so with them at Park Crescent, if he could manage to spare the time from business. But there could be no doubt about that of course. Young men in love could always spare time to visit the object of their affections, however absorbing business engagements might be; and Aunt Patty knew that Basil Hyde had no occasion to tie himself to an office more closely than he felt inclined to be so tied. She had learned a little about him and his affairs from Brandon, in the letter announcing his probable visit to Wareham. Aunt Patty, after the first burst of satisfaction was over, became conscious of a lurking feeling of surprise that Bessie was not the niece engaged, instead of Tots. As she recalled the events of the girls' visit, before the death of their father, and the breaking up of their Yorkshire home, she felt sure that in those days she had fancied that the liking was between this young man and her eldest niece; he

had never even seen Tots at that time, and therefore he must have come to Wareham to call on Bessie. Aunt Patty considered this curious question for some time, and finally came to the conclusion that she must have been mistaken. At all events, the affair evidently gave satisfaction to all parties; and dear Bessie had written such a delightful letter, taking such a cheerful view of the subject—though many a more selfish sister would have felt melancholy at the prospect of losing Tots—that evidently it was all right so far as she was concerned. Then Aunt Patty straightway went to work, to lay plans and build castles in the air, concerning both present and future. She would persuade Sophia to spare her youngest niece for a short visit to herself during Mr. Hyde's stay; in order that Sophy should make the acquaintance of her brother-in-law that was to be. Perhaps she could induce Brandon to get a holiday, and bring Bessie down to Park Crescent for a few days, and what a happy party they would all be together! This plan promised to be so delightful, that Aunt Patty there and then wrote off to Miss Grantham, to know if she might have the loan of her youngest niece; giving the old

lady three weeks' notice, in order that she might digest the idea. Aunt Patty put the reason for her request in the strongest possible light; for it was by no means certain that Sophy's new guardian would be willing to let her out of her clutches. Sophy had heard the news, and had written her congratulations, by the time Aunt Patty's letter reached their small household; and upon the first opportunity which presented itself, she had broken the important news to Frampton. That gentleman, ensconced in the depths of a most comfortable arm-chair, was consoling himself by caressing the cigars in his pocket, since the "Old Maid," as he irreverently styled his aunt, would not let him have them in his mouth anywhere within reach of her nose. He received Sophy's communication without the display of any unnecessary emotion. It was not his way to agitate his mind concerning the joys and sorrows of his fellow-creatures; and any event affecting the welfare of the two sisters so far away, did not touch him so nearly as to excite any extravagant burst of feeling on his part.

"I have seen this Basil Hyde," he remarked; "I met him at Brand's once or twice."

"And what sort of a man is he?" eagerly questioned Sophy, anxious for every detail respecting the man who had first broken up the quiet monotony of their girls' lives, and introduced a smack of romance into the family.

"Oh! a good enough sort of man," returned Frampton, who was not to be roused to any enthusiasm on the subject.

"But," cried Sophy, all agape with excitement; "describe him to me! Tots does not say what he looks like; I wonder she doesn't, and I am longing to know. Is he dark or fair? What colour is his hair? Is he tall, or little, like you, Frampton?"

"Upon my life!" exclaimed that youth, smitten thus in a vulnerable part of his armour—for if there was one point in his personal appearance which he did not view with entire complacency it was the shortness of his stature. "Upon my word! you women do ask the most imbecile questions! I don't know anything about his looks; *I* never noticed what colour the man's hair was. But you women, you judge of everything by outward appearance; now we form our opinion upon different and higher grounds."

"Oh, yes!" answered Sophy, laughing,

“you find out how much a man has a year, and judge of his goodness in proportion to his income.”

Sophy had discovered thus much concerning Frampton's views of men and things, and she could not resist this mild retort. But he was too indolent to be roused by such a Lilliputian dart to any show of irritation; and therefore he contented himself with disposing of the subject, as he fondly thought, by the quenching assertion (frequently resorted to when he found Sophy too sharp for his taste),

“Oh, women don't understand these things.”

But Sophy returned to the attack, having no intention of being quenched, at least until her curiosity was fully satisfied.

“It's nonsense to say you have no idea of what he is like!” she returned. “You must have observed whether he was dark or otherwise. Does his hair curl, or is it straight like yours?”

“Well,” cried her victim, driven to bay, “since you are so very anxious concerning matters of such trifling importance, I can tell you thus much: he is, on the whole, rather tall than otherwise. He has a sketchy pair of legs, and I believe he sports spectacles, or an eye-glass, or something. As to his hair,

he didn't curl it in the days when I knew him, but he may have mounted ringlets since then in order to enhance his charms in Tots's eyes."

This was a long and satisfactory speech for Frampton to make, and it is to be hoped that Sophy felt duly gratified and impressed. She left him alone then, to repose after his unusual exertions, while she fell to pondering about this brother-in-law elect, and lamenting, in her simple mind, that he should be afflicted with sketchy legs and spectacles.

"Perhaps," she thought, "only for these drawbacks he might have been handsome. I should like a handsome brother-in-law; I must persuade Tots to send me his photograph."

Presently her reverie was disturbed by Frampton, who struck in abruptly, as if seized with a sudden idea.

"I wonder," he cried, looking quite animated, for him, "what in the world Bessie has been about all this while!"

"Why?" inquired guileless Sophy.

"Why?" repeated Frampton with an accent of fine scorn, excited by his sister's obtuseness. "Why, that she lets Tots get engaged before her. She must have been

playing her cards very badly. She will be an old maid if she does not look out."

"And why shouldn't she be an old maid?" asked Sophy. "Perhaps she would prefer it."

"Pooh!" cried the young gentleman with supercilious incredulity. "No woman in the world would be an old maid if she could help it. I hope Bess will fulfil her mission and marry, as she ought to do."

"But," said Sophy thoughtfully, "I don't think it is every woman's mission to marry. To every man his work, and to every woman too, I suppose; and some women seem to have other work in the world."

"Stuff!" said Frampton again, with the air of a man dismissing the subject. "It is very well for you to talk like that; we all know you are going to be the old maid of the family."

"Well, Framps," said Sophy quietly, "you know it has been proved that there are a million more women than men in the world, so there must be a million old maids somewhere, I suppose, and why should not I be one of them?"

"Oh," said Frampton, rising slowly to a perpendicular position and yawning, prepara-

tory to taking his leave for the evening, "if you come to statistics, you will soon get out of your depth. Women know nothing about these things."

Then he suffered his sister to kiss the tip of his whisker, which he loftily bent towards her for that purpose ; and, giving a parting kick to the unsuspecting cat, he took his departure.

Miss Grantham had not been very well that evening. At least she had finished the book she had been interested in at an early hour, and finding the time hang somewhat heavy on her hands, had bethought her that she might as well have a headache and go to bed.

Thus it was that when Frampton had dropped in, he found the room empty ; for Sophy had gone with her aunt to bathe her forehead with Eau-de-Cologne and minister to her generally. This did not altogether please him, for he liked being entertained, and was apt to feel bored when overdosed with his own society. He had almost made up his mind to withdraw, when Sophy entered the room full of the news which had just arrived in a letter from Tots, and eagerly desirous of imparting the same to some sympathetic bosom. Her aunt had also received an official com-

munication from Bessie ; therefore Sophy hoped for a long discussion of this most interesting subject.

But Miss Grantham did not testify any anxiety to receive or communicate ideas. She sniffed and snorted a good deal, with her sharp nose elevated, as she perused Bessie's closely-written letter ; and then, catching sight of Sophy's eager face, all alight with suppressed impatience, and looking for some encouragement to express her delight, this most unromantic of spinsters snuffed her out promptly, and told her not to talk nonsense before the child had opened her mouth.

Miss Grantham's unenthusiastic reception of news so nearly concerning the welfare of one of her nieces may partly be explained by the fact that the manner of its coming to her knowledge was not such as she considered due to her own importance. She considered that she ought to have had the affair first intimated to her by Brand, who was of course the male head of the family. But he had totally neglected a duty so obviously incumbent upon him, and had left it to Bessie. This was highly unsatisfactory, for Bessie, girl-like, had entirely omitted such important items as the amount of Mr. Hyde's income and who

were his connections, and what were his prospects, &c. Then it certainly was due to herself, as head of the family on the female side, that she should have been consulted in this matter, and her advice asked and given before the hand of one of her nieces was promised in marriage. To be sure, she had never seen Tots in her life; nor had she heard even the name of her nephew-elect before it was announced to her that he proposed to ally himself with her family; still she considered that her opinion and advice were indispensable, and ought to have been sought on this occasion.

So it came to pass that a spirit of virtuous indignation arose within her, and she soothed her injured feelings by taking refuge in an imaginary headache, which would furnish her with an excuse for harassing the lives of whomsoever came within her reach. It will be seen that Sophy's life with this attached relative was by no means without its drawbacks, and yet, take it altogether, it was not such a bad life. Now that Sophy had recovered the depressing effects of her father's illness and death, her natural spirits returned in a sort of rebound, and supported her under much that would have worried and tried a less cheerful

temper. She had plenty of liberty to go about when and where she liked, and had managed to make a few pleasant acquaintances. She was a devourer of books; no sort of literature came amiss to her, and her aunt's library was a well-stocked one. She had plenty of leisure to indulge such tastes, for her duties were not very numerous, so that her days on the whole passed pleasantly. Miss Grantham began at odd times to testify a growing affection for her merry-spirited, sharp-tongued niece. At the bottom of her heart she admired an independent spirit, and certainly Sophy had shown from the first that she was not one to submit tamely to any domineering treatment. Miss Grantham had always governed those who had been so blessed as to share her home and society hitherto with a high hand; but then they had seemed to like it, or at least had never plucked up the courage to resist, except Miss Blusocks, and she had now removed herself to more congenial climes. Therefore Miss Grantham, upon Sophy's advent, began to try the repressive system, to see how it would work with her new *protégée*. But Sophy had speedily intimated that she had no notion of being repressed.

Sophy's duties, as has already been said,

were sufficiently light. She had nothing to do with the housekeeping, for Miss Grantham had a horror of being set aside in her own house. She had only to give out rations of tea and coffee, to keep the sitting-rooms supplied with tasteful bouquets, and was expected always to be at hand to minister to her aunt in any of her sudden attacks of indisposition. On these occasions she would deluge her fond relative's brown front with Eau-de-Cologne, and scrub her poor hands, till the old lady, roused to animation by the extreme vigour of Sophy's mode of proceeding, would cry out, "There, there, child! that will do! You can leave me now, and send Eliza."

Eliza was the unfortunate handmaiden who came in for all the scoldings and worryings, of which a portion would no doubt have fallen to Sophy's share, had she been found willing to consent to such an arrangement. As it was, poor Eliza had to bear all upon her one pair of shoulders. She threatened to leave regularly about three times a week, but somehow she still remained, being either dowered with a surprising amount of that virtue so necessary to the perfection of a woman's (and especially a lady's maid's)

character—patience; or else, finding her consolation in high wages, and perquisites in the pleasing shape of her mistress's cast-off gowns and caps.

Yet this life would perhaps have proved a dull one to Sophy, had it not been that Frampton was a very frequent visitor at Rosemary Lodge. He had taken high Honours, and now took pupils, but only as a temporary expedient; for he had an eye to a higher walk in life hereafter, and, as he flattered himself, at no very distant period. He inhabited tastefully-furnished rooms in the vicinity of that College to which he had been such a shining ornament; and condescended to read for five or six hours a day with a couple of sprigs of the aristocracy, at the modest rate of 200*l.* a year for each. But this tutor drudgery was not to his taste. Was it not a complete hiding of his light under a bushel, to condemn him, Frampton Bowsted, Esq., Bachelor of Arts, to grind with young cubs, and fit them for the University mill? But it was only his want of money, he thought, that stood in his way, and debarred him from the immediate attainment of a high position. This obstacle, however, he was determined should be over-

come, by some means or other, before he was many years older.

He had not found his rich girl yet, who was beautiful as well as wealthy; for she must be beautiful to satisfy his fastidious taste. He had already enjoyed several opportunities of choosing a wife among girls with plenty of money, and who—so he told himself—were ready enough to jump down his throat; but they none of them came up to his standard of excellence. While looking out, however, he would not object to a wind-fall of money; and even if his future wife should bring him a handsome dowry, he did not desire that all the wealth should be on her side; such a position would be humiliating to him. With these views it behoved him to make hay while the sun shone; in other words, to be on the look-out for every opportunity of making money.

Now the particular hay-crop which this promising gentleman was just now desirous of cultivating, lay in the direction of Rosemary Lodge; and hence it was, that Frampton Bowsted, Esq., B.A., was so frequent and attentive a visitor at his aunt's abode. This old lady had "lots of money." Everybody knew this for a fact; and she could not

carry her wealth away with her when she should take her departure from this battlefield for contending medical principles; therefore in the course of time, and probably not long hence, for she was growing old and infirm, all this money must come to somebody else. And why should not he be that somebody? Thus had Frampton searchingly inquired of himself, when the idea first dawned upon him of improving his acquaintance with his aunt.

He proceeded in the first place to "top-dress" the ground, by making what he considered very moving apologies to this wealthy aunt for former shortcomings in the matter of calling upon her. Next, he endeavoured to fertilize the soil by spring showers of subtle flattery, and with the sunshine of as many delicate attentions as he thought she could swallow at once. Having thus set matters in train, he visited his field of labour three or four times a week regularly; not often in the mornings, since he desired his aunt to suppose that absorbing studies occupied him during the earlier part of the day; but usually in the evenings, after the old lady's early tea, and his own dinner.

Sophy, being but young, gave her brother full credit for all the virtue to which he laid claim, in thus devoting so much of his valuable time to the entertainment of two female relatives. She suspected no ulterior motives, and in fact it had never entered her head to consider whether her aunt had money or not. Besides, she regarded Frampton as a very fortunate young man, and at least well off, if not in positive affluence. The idea of cultivating any one's goodwill for the sake of money was, in her estimation, the very depth of meanness; and nothing would have persuaded her that her brother was capable of anything so base.

Frampton never condescended to take his sister into his confidence, looking down upon her from the heights of his ineffable wisdom, and considering her as a mere child in intellect, though sufficiently sharp for a woman.

Although Sophy looked up to Frampton as a remarkably clever and promising fellow, such was not the opinion entertained of him by his worthy aunt. That acute elderly lady had never been distinguished for artlessness herself, and she was thus disposed to suspect the motives of others. She did not look upon

such a sudden spasm of affection on the part of her nephew as a touching and disinterested tribute to her own merits, for she saw through it almost from the first, and promised herself the pleasure of disappointing him, and shattering all his fine schemes. But in the meanwhile she could derive some gratification from a judicious course of snubbing one who, her instincts told her truly, would be content to swallow a good deal of what was unpalatable for the sake of the golden harvest he hoped to reap ultimately. Really it was wonderful what mortifications this long-suffering young man underwent at the hands of his honoured relative, and what sweetness of temper he displayed in patiently putting up with them all. His docility was a source of continual surprise to Sophy, since she knew nothing of the prospects which reconciled him to present snubbings.

Miss Grantham commenced operations by finding fault with a certain faint odour of tobacco, which made itself perceptible upon her nephew's entrance into the sacred retirement of her drawing-room. It is to be presumed that the dutiful youth was at considerable pains to remove this cause of

offence, for he gave his aunt no further reason for complaint in that particular. Tobacco, however, continued to be a formidable weapon of offence in her skilled hands; and she would treat him to frequent dissertations upon the folly of young men indulging a habit at once expensive and disgusting, and which, she would observe with trenchant scorn, had not one single point to recommend it.

Miss Grantham sometimes, to vary the entertainment, would be witheringly severe upon the idleness and folly of the existing generation of young men, comparing them with the youth of a former age, who, according to her, appeared as the models of every virtue, by comparison. In fact, her methods of torture were as numerous as they were ingenious, but Frampton bore all with perfect sweetness. Meanwhile, he flattered himself that his aunt was very far from penetrating into his secret counsels, and prided himself upon the consummate astuteness which enabled him effectually to disguise and conceal them. Little did he think that he was overmatched, even in dissimulation and sagacity, by a woman; had this fact been suddenly revealed to him, the shock of find-

ing himself out-manceuvred by an old maid, would have shattered his finely-organized nervous system, and disturbed his graceful serenity for ever.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE was much light skirmishing, and one final battle, between Sophy and her aunt, before permission was gained to accept Aunt Patty's invitation. Miss Grantham affected to feel grievously hurt that her niece should be anxious to leave her so soon. Now and then she would fire off volleys, consisting of pithy sentences condemnatory of young people who were so given to change, who were for perpetually gadding about, who never knew when they were well off. But all this passed harmlessly over Sophy, who had learned in the course of three months to pay no great heed to her aunt's varying moods.

It was with a glad heart that Sophy packed up her wardrobe, and made all her little arrangements. After six months of monotony, the prospect of a change into the genial household at Wareham afforded her

unbounded delight. The idea of seeing her sisters again, of meeting the dear Aunt Patty (for whom she had conceived a vehement affection), the prospect of being introduced to and in a position to criticize her future brother-in-law, proved quite sufficient to fill her mind with pleasant anticipations; and a more happy and excited little maid than was Sophy on the morning of her departure could hardly be found. On that morning, contrary to her usual habit, Miss Grantham actually appeared at breakfast, which meal had hitherto been conveyed upstairs to her by the hands of the much-enduring Eliza; and a tiny teapot, calculated to hold an infinitesimal quantity, was sacred to her morning refreshment. Sophy therefore had been accustomed always to breakfast alone, and this had proved one of the most irksome of her daily trials, since her tongue frequently ached to talk, when there was nobody to talk to. Much annoyed was she, when she descended to the breakfast-parlour on the morning of her journey, to find her aunt already established at the table, who saluted her with an aspect more than usually repressive. As the meal proceeded, it became evident that Miss Grantham's especial object

in gracing the table with her presence on that particular occasion was that she might have an opportunity of discussing with her niece all the possible accidents and misadventures to which travellers are usually or remotely liable; a subject which she pursued to some length.

At last, when Sophy, having well provided herself before starting, lest she should have no other opportunity of refreshment until late in the day, pushed away her cup, and rose to finish her preparation, the old lady, who really felt some little regret at the prospect of losing her niece's society, ceased her lamentable prognostications, and found a new vent for her emotions. Drawing out a pocket-handkerchief of appalling dimensions, with much solemn trepidation, she began her arrangements for an hysterical attack; anxious, it would seem, that it should be no fault of hers if the parting moment failed to be as dismal as possible. A sudden terror seized upon Sophy, lest at the last minute she might be called upon to relinquish her anticipated journey, or at any rate lose her train if her aunt's symptoms should prove very serious indeed, and she was by no means prepared to forego the holiday obtained with

so much difficulty. Actuated by a sudden inspiration, she pulled out her watch, and exclaiming, "Dear me, how late it is! I had no idea of the time!" she dived at her aunt's cheek, bestowing thereon a parting kiss, and with a hearty "Good-bye, Auntie!" was gone before the old lady could recover from the astonishment caused her by the extreme suddenness of the whole proceeding.

Yet another pleasing surprise was in store for the departing damsel. At the station, whom should she behold but the elegant Frampton, got up in a light summer suit made to fit to perfection, and loftily surveying the bustling multitude.

Sophy flew up to him with delighted eyes, for such an attention on his part was a pleasure quite unexpected. On his side the meeting was calmness itself, and he surrendered a spotlessly-gloved hand to her sisterly clasp, as if he were conferring an inestimable favour.

"Ah, Sophy, just in time. I thought I had better come and see you off."

"So good of you," said the unsuspecting child, quite convinced that the sole and entire object of his appearance at so early an hour was to see her safely off. But no object so

trifling as that of merely seeing his sister safe in a railway carriage, had brought the distinguished Frampton out so much earlier than his wont. His motives were far beyond the penetration of such a mere child as Sophy. This little attention to his sister was all a portion of his deeply-laid schemes. He knew that Miss Grantham would come to the knowledge of this brotherly attention on his part, and he flattered himself that it would place him before the eyes of his revered aunt in the light of a tender and devoted brother.

At all events, the game was worth keeping alive, even if it should prove somewhat irksome in the playing. He did not acknowledge to himself that he looked upon his sister in the light of a rival; and yet it was the secret feeling in his heart.

Thus it was that, when the train which conveyed her away had passed out of sight and hearing, Frampton returned to his luxurious bachelor lodgings, with the feeling that an obstacle to his advancement had been removed. All unconscious of the deep designs harboured in the breast of her affectionate and considerate brother, Sophy sped on her way, occupying herself in speculations with regard to the prospective brother-in-law,

to whom she was so soon to be introduced. She pictured him as a man of stately proportions, erect and majestic; for Sophy, being little herself, was apt to be unduly impressed by size in others. Having thus arranged for his personal appearance to her entire satisfaction, Sophy fell to considering how she should behave when first introduced to this paragon of brothers-in-law. Should she address him as "Mr. Hyde," or did sisterly sympathy require of her that she should call him "Basil" at once?

Then this romantic young woman fell to thinking about Bessie, and wondering what she thought about it all, for, strange to say, Bessie had not written her a single letter on the subject. This was unaccountable, for Bessie was generally an excellent correspondent. She had not even communicated anything about her plans, though Aunt Patty's letter had mentioned that they were all invited to Park Crescent, along with Tots and Basil Hyde. The interesting nature of Sophy's meditations so effectually beguiled the way, that she was taken by surprise, when the nature of the scenery, and the neighbourhood of huge chimneys blackening the summer sky, warned her that she was

approaching Wareham. The pony carriage was at the station awaiting her arrival, and soon conveyed her to Park Crescent.

"Here she is: welcome, dear child!" cried a cordial voice; and Auntie, snatching off her gold-rimmed spectacles, in order that they might not come in the way, hurried to the door, to be the first to greet and embrace her niece. She welcomed her with a motherly hug, so different to Miss Grantham's starched salute that Sophy clung to her for an instant with a heart too full to speak. Uncle, too, shuffled forward, struggling the while, first with one vagabond slipper and then with the other, and took Sophy into his embrace, when Aunt Patty could be prevailed upon to give her up. Behind him was Tots, who, rosy as ever, well-dressed, plump and comfortable as of yore, and, with placidity of manner for a young lady just engaged which amazed Sophy, gave her a sisterly caress. But surely these were not all? Sophy looked round, expecting to behold the glorious male creature whom she had pictured to herself. No such person was anywhere visible, nor yet were there any traces of either Bessie or Brandon. Bustle, who had now arrived at the extreme limit beyond which fatness

could no further go, rolled plethorically towards her, striving to wag the portly appendage which served him for a tail; and the cat mewed a tender greeting, but these were all. She had no time, however, to ask questions, for Aunt Patty, what between kissing, talking, and giving orders for tea, had the conversation all to herself, and no one else could wedge in a word.

But when the two girls were at last together in the privacy of Tots's bedroom, then did Sophy indemnify herself for past silence and open a raking fire of questions upon the defenceless foe. Where was Mr. Hyde? Was she to call him Basil? Would he be in that evening? How could Tots pass a moment away from him? How did uncle and aunt like him? Was he as tall and handsome as she (Sophy) had pictured to herself? These inquiries, and a hundred more, did Sophy pour forth in a torrent, never desisting until impelled thereto by want of breath.

Meanwhile Tots leaned back in the depths of an arm-chair, and answered, when her turn came to speak, in a very deliberate way, and without the least confusion or excitement, "Basil was to follow in a day or two;

business engagements detained him for the present. Brand was far too busy to take holiday, and Bessie preferred remaining with him, so as to help him in the evenings. Basil was to have the big spare room, which had been furbished up for him. Sophy should go presently, and see how handsome the new curtains looked. She might call Mr. Hyde, 'Basil,' if she liked. She (Tots) supposed he would hardly expect to be treated as a stranger by her sisters." And all this was delivered without a vestige of that pleasing flutter, and half-shy, half-eager delight, which Sophy had expected to find in Tots's manner when speaking of her lover. Certainly nobody would take Tots to be in love. So thought Sophy, and somehow she felt strangely chilled and disappointed. Tots was so little altered. She was the same, apparently, as she had been before. How was it that she took her happiness so coolly, and could talk commonplace, just as if she were the same as anybody else? Sophy went downstairs, bewildered, if not saddened. She had expected things to be different, somehow.

No one gazing that evening on Aunt Patty's countenance, shining with benevo-

lence, and rippling with smiles, would have supposed that she had just experienced a keen disappointment, which was that Brand and Bessie were not to be of her merry party.

Brand had put aside the idea of a week at Wareham as a thing quite out of the question, for success in the future depended upon present perseverance and diligence. He would, therefore, wait till Christmas, and perhaps try and get a few days then. But he used his utmost eloquence to prevail on Bessie to go. There was no reason, he argued, why she should remain mewed up during the hot weather. Girls could not stand continued application, such as did men no harm. Aunt Patty would not mind his absence so much, but she would feel vexed, very likely, if Bessie also declined her invitation.

But Bessie was immovable in her resolution to stay. "Let me stay here with you," she begged. "I would much rather, indeed I would." But she did not give him any reasons for this preference.

At length he gave in, conscious of a certain sense of bewilderment that she could like a solitary life, such as she led with him, better

than plenty of society, and every comfort at her aunt's, and dismissed the subject with his usual remark when women and their ways puzzled him. "Well! well! there is no use in arguing with women," he said.

Bessie told Aunt Patty, by way of excuse, that she was of use to Brand, and did not like to leave him to solitary evenings; but this, although it contributed to her determination, was not by any means her chief motive. She felt that she positively must have a week's solitude, in order to do battle with herself, and become once more mistress of her wandering affections. It was a sore conflict which Bessie entered into, and one which many a woman has had to engage in, and fight out, unaided and unsuspected. Bessie was resolved she would see Basil Hyde no more till she could look upon him as her sister's lover without a single regret.

Meanwhile, Basil Hyde, after a longer delay than he had at first anticipated, paid his visit to Wareham, and arrived at Park Crescent, much to the gratification of all the good people there assembled. He stayed a considerable time, and would have stayed longer, no doubt, had not a very ingenious expedient for making the most of a delightful

summer been hit upon by those festive old people. But of this more hereafter. Uncle Rob was charmed with his new nephew-in-law, who appeared well-informed upon all sorts of subjects and could discourse with equal ease upon matters philosophical or scientific. Aunt Patty soon loved him like a mother; but then to be sure her motherly instincts lay very near the surface, and were readily called forth towards any deserving object, and to Tots, of course, his presence was felicity. But there was one in the family circle who could not quite make up her mind with what degree of favour to regard him. And this was Sophy, who, on her first introduction, had experienced a disappointment from which it took her some time to recover. The ebony-haired Adonis of lofty stature and majestic presence, dwindled into the very ordinary-looking tall young man, with commonplace features, and sketchy legs, of whom Frampton had warned her. Sophy felt injured in being so deceived by this provoking Mr. Hyde, who was certainly bound by all rules of common good-breeding to come up to the standard of her expectations. As he had egregiously failed in doing this, Sophy felt that she had been taken in

and deceived by him, in a most unwarrantable manner; and it was therefore some time before she could prevail upon herself to overlook his fault, and take him into favour. In her first revulsion of feeling against him, she did the poor fellow's personal appearance less than justice, and it was not until she had been acquainted with him for some weeks that she could bring herself to allow him even a moderate share of good looks. But a matter of still greater surprise and disappointment presented itself to the ardent damsel, and this was the behaviour of the lovers to each other. "I never in my life beheld such a stupid pair!" she wrote to Bessie, in one of the vehement outpourings of spirit which were frequent in her letters. "I declare their amazing calmness of demeanour sometimes quite provokes me. Why, they might be just common-place people, with nothing in their situation to make them happier than anybody else. Also, one would naturally suppose that it must afford them the highest gratification to do things for each other. But yesterday, Tots flatly refused to mend Basil's glove for him, declaring that she could 'not be bored to sew, this hot weather;' and a day or two

ago, when we contrived to drag ourselves as far as the meadows in order to find some fresh air, unpolluted by smoke, Basil strode calmly over an awful stile, and marched ahead, leaving Tots to make the best of her way over without help; and because she slipped, and tore her glove right across the back, he unfeelingly laughed at her. I verily believe it is mostly Tots's fault, for she always declares that love-making bores her."

After all, Sophy might have found an excuse for the lovers in the extreme heat of the weather, which really rendered even smiling an exertion not to be undertaken on slight grounds. Everything and everybody seemed to be suffering the extreme of lassitude and dejection. Even the mercurial Sophy, who was not easily subdued—or if repressed one moment, was sure to rebound the next, like a human Jack-in-the-box—even she almost felt at times as if talking was more than she could accomplish. These things being deeply considered by Uncle Rob and Aunt Patty, they laid a little plan; and after a few days of discussing the subject in all its bearings between themselves, they announced it with all its details fully arranged. Why should not the same party as were there

assembled go to the sea-side for a month, during the excessive heat of that exceptional summer? And why should not Bessie be entreated, nay compelled, to join the trip, even if Brand might not be prevailed on to do so?

Who did not long for sea breezes, especially those who could get nothing better to breathe for the best part of the year than diluted smoke? Did the assembled young people approve the plan of going to the sea-side?

The young people, in a simultaneous burst of enthusiasm, intimated that they did approve. It only then remained to be settled in the general assembly, when they should start, and where they should go.

CHAPTER VII.

Even at the sea-side it seemed hardly possible to obtain a hint of coolness that hot summer, save towards evening, when a faint breeze stirred.

On a certain grilling day in the middle of August, the little town of Ravensbay, bathed in scorching sunshine, seemed almost deserted by its inhabitants. Nobody, not even adventurous tourists and visitors, cared to venture outside their doors to be baked. The High Street presented a barren expanse, guiltless of pedestrians, its solitude only enlivened by three pugnacious curs, who kept up a desultory warfare, pausing at intervals to lie down and pant, and a few inquiring pigeons, pecking, with a subdued air, between the interstices of the uneven pavement. Now and then, however, the utter silence would be broken by the rattling of a huge waggonette, drawn by exhausted horses, and

crammed to overflowing with holiday seekers, who were prepared to defy every extreme of climate in the pursuit of pleasure. But even their laughter had a muffled sound, and their faces wore somewhat of a depressed aspect. The shops, with awnings up and blinds down, presented a sleepy look, and seemed too languid to entertain for a moment the thought of doing any business. Here and there, within the dark recesses of a draper's, an exhausted-looking youth, with an air of the deepest dejection, might be seen measuring muslins for some stray fair one, who had summoned up courage sufficient to carry her through a shopping expedition; or, behind a grocer's white blind, some expansive matron, driven forth to cater for the wants of a numerous family, sat heavily on a slender cane-chair, giving orders in a stifled voice to the grocer's young man behind the counter, the redness of whose face contrasted pleasingly with the refreshing whiteness of his apron. Not even at the Post-Office, generally the centre of excitement, could anything like a bustle be achieved; and the two old gentlemen who had turned in there, ostensibly to look at the daily paper, but in reality simply because exhausted nature could no further

go, found it impossible to get up even the most feeble enthusiasm over the Local Intelligence or the latest object of interest.

But amid the general sleepiness that prevailed, there was one favoured spot, the selected rendezvous of a party of youths, who congregated there daily, and sometimes several times a day, to discuss cigars and other people's business; and who frequently introduced a pleasing variety into the proceedings by carrying on a sharp encounter of wits with the damsel who presided at the counter. This was the tobacconist's shop and circulating library, where every book was to be had, except the precise volume wanted. This attractive repository, known as "Dolly's," was seldom without its little knot of choice spirits, who were sure to find several times a day that their tobacco pouches needed replenishing. The heat on this particular August morning had not deterred more than one or two of the usual members of this social fraternity from assembling, so that the four or five cane chairs which the establishment boasted were each furnished with an occupant. There were a brace of young lawyers, of whose profession Ravensbay could boast an astonishing number of

representatives, and an embryo doctor, with a commanding voice and a splendid development of nose. The other two were visitors, Cambridge men, at large during "the Long," who, finding the excitement of Ravensbay not so consuming as to absorb all their time and energies, devoted themselves to the consumption of tobacco with admirable singleness of purpose.

Conversation had sunk to a low ebb among the assembly of youths, who seemed by one consent to have left the burden of supporting it entirely to the doctor. He for his part, however, was quite equal to the occasion; and being a Ravensbayite, he was graciously enlightening the benighted Cambridge men on local subjects generally.

"You see," he was saying, gently caressing the distinguishing ornament of his countenance, "Ravensbay is a quiet little place; a great deal of natural beauty, you know—scenery, and all that sort of thing; but not much in the way of excitement to attract visitors. If any one were to start a theatre, now!"

He looked round as he propounded the suggestion, as if to ascertain whether any one present indicated by his countenance that

nothing would afford him greater pleasure than to start a theatre. But the idea, finding no encouragement, was fain to die a natural death, or be locked up once more in the bosom of the great man who had originated it, to be brought forward again at some future time, when the unenterprising spirits of Ravensbay should have been educated up to the point.

Leaving the tobacconist's, and crossing the ample market-place, which exhibits some feeble sparks of animation in the shape of a string of herring-carts, whose shiny contents are in a fair way of being broiled by the sun, we pass down a narrow street; and after turning the corner of an obtrusive hotel, finally emerge on to the shore. Surely a breeze will meet us here! But no; the sea lies in an oily calm, not a boat specks its surface—no one would have the temerity to row on such a day—and not even out at sea is there wind enough for sailing-vessels. The tide is out, and there are beautiful dry sand-banks extending the whole length of the shore, to the limit where it curves suddenly towards the bold headland which forms the southern boundary of the bay.

But the very sands, inviting as they look,

seem deserted, only dotted here and there by a group of enterprising infants absorbed in the erection of some architectural wonder, or by a stray mermaid, who, with hair down her back, and umbrella sheltering her from the imminent danger of roasting, sits on the shingle wrestling feebly with the intricacies of a novel.

In one spot, at the edge of the water, stand three dejected-looking bathing machines, their red wheels immersed, intimating that as many persons have been found rash enough to encounter the exertion of preparing for a plunge. The rows of lodging-houses, built with a truly sublime indifference to architectural uniformity, seem to have over-slept themselves, and to be slowly blinking preparatory to waking up; with the front doors all wide open as if gasping for air. On the steps of one or two of the best-looking houses stand groups of children armed with buckets and spades, and exhibiting a startling variety of sea-side costume, from the broad hat and flabby pinafore of native plebeians to the daintily befrilled attire of more fashionable little misses.

All who have arrived at years of discretion judge it better to remain in-doors during the mid-day heat. But as evening approaches,

and reviving airs creep over the surface of the bay, wrinkling its surface into tiny wavelets, Ravensbay wakes up to a surprising degree of animation. Skiffs manned by sturdy rowers dart hither and thither on the water, and graceful little sailing-vessels spread their white canvas to catch the rising breeze. The sands, so deserted before, now present a lively scene. Troops of gaily-dressed people move in every direction, and the sounds of conversation and laughter fill the evening air. Old gentlemen come out to stroll, and young people come out to flirt. Young gentlemen, got up to kill, lounge elegantly along; while young ladies, dressed within an inch of their lives, flatter themselves that their surpassing attractions are drilling holes in the said young gentlemen's susceptible hearts. Lovers discuss plans for the future, or stroll side by side in a silence more delicious than words. Small children, threatened by the horrors of approaching bedtime, seem bent on making the most of what time remains, by diving hither and thither in frantic games of hide and seek, in and out, among old gentlemen's legs.

Ponderous married couples gaze with parental pride upon the graceful forms of their daughters as they smile sweetly, or converse

in animated tones with eligible young men, faultless as to coats and connections.

Opposite the hotel a German band is stationed, which adds to the exhilaration of the scene by performing selections from "Norma" in an excruciatingly plaintive and dissonant manner. On each side of the little wooden landing-stage a crowd is rapidly collecting, and many of the loungers on the shingle stroll in the same direction, as though animated by one common impulse. Presently the sands in the near neighbourhood of the landing-stage are completely covered by a crowd of eager humanity.

What can be their object in collecting so thickly on that particular spot? A man drowning? A Newfoundland dog performing feats of swimming? A boat overturned? No, none of these things. Very shortly the object so eagerly expected appears, and a general satisfied hum, together with such remarks as, "There she is," "Yonder she comes," &c., pass through the crowd, as a long low line of smoke is seen from behind the headland. Every eye is turned in that direction, opera-glasses are levelled at it by those who have them, and wished for by those who have them not; and a steamer almost imme-

diately rounds the Head, and enters the placid waters of the bay.

On the deck a goodly number of passengers are congregated, most of them anxiously looking forward to the conclusion of their sufferings. Among them is Bessie Bowsted, leaning against the side of the vessel, and beholding with delight the beautiful and animated scene spread out before her.

“One might be very happy spending one’s days in a peaceful spot like this, do not you think so?”

Bessie started, recognizing the voice of Barnes Onslow. She felt ill-pleased at being disturbed in the delicious reverie she was indulging in, and Barnes—poor Barnes!—had rather a knack of breaking in upon her thoughts at inopportune moments. He and his brother had been fellow-passengers with our travellers. By a very odd coincidence, just about the very time chosen by the Park Crescent party for their sea-side expedition, these two young men were seized with an acute desire to travel for their health; and each came suddenly to the conclusion that the Isle of Man was the very place he would have preferred above all others, and Ravensbay the very spot in that island that would best suit

his complaint. Barnes exerted himself during the voyage to make everything as comfortable and luxurious as possible for Bessie, insisting on folding his own travelling-rug round her feet to keep her from being chilly, and entreating, later on in the day when the sun grew scorching, that he might be allowed to hold up her umbrella. But Bessie had declined this last kind offer, preferring to be her own umbrella-bearer.

Barnes, after this rebuff, which appeared to sink his spirits to the very depths of despair (though it was very tenderly administered), vanished for a long period, during which Bessie went to see how it fared with her aunt, to whom a sea-voyage was anything but a source of unmixed pleasure, and who therefore had retired into the saloon the moment the vessel began to move, voluntarily burying herself alive for the entire period of seven hours. Bessie found her prone on a sofa, groaning in spirit, and the corners of her usually smiling mouth looking as if they were tied under her chin. Bessie's tender cares cheered and comforted her to such a degree that she fell at last into a sound sleep, lasting two or three hours, during which time Bessie remained beside her until a

bustle on deck attracted her thither once more.

What a delightful scene met her eyes ! The vessel was gliding rapidly within a stone-throw of a magnificent rock-bound coast ; and the water, here of a deep green colour and intensely clear, showed the rugged bases plain to the view. Here and there the stern seawall was rent into black caverns, by convulsions of Nature, long ago past, and low-browed caves were seen at intervals, where the water lay sullen and shadowed, and conveying the idea of immense depth. Crowning the cliffs, soft turf rose in gentle undulations, where sheep might be seen nibbling, poised, as it sometimes seemed, on the extreme verge.

To Bessie, who had never in her life beheld coast scenery, those glorious rocks and precipices, with their dim and mysterious recesses, seemed nothing less than enchanting, and her imagination revelled in the fancies that their suggestive grandeur called up.

Presently the vessel turned the headland and steamed into the bay ; and then, another scene, in its way equally beautiful, burst upon her. Before her lay the little town, picturesque in its irregularity ; its white houses thrown into relief by the wooded and moun-

tainous background. A lovely little glen opening abruptly at the southern extremity of the shore, lost itself at the base of a bold mountain, which, robed in regal purple, towered behind the lesser hills in the foreground.

At the landing-stage symptoms of excitement were apparent ; and presently three or four plethoric-looking boats started with provoking deliberation, shaping their course for the advancing steamer. These were destined to convey the hapless passengers from the vessel to the beforementioned wooden landing-stage, where they were to be deposited, to take their chance of slipping or falling on its slippery and uneven surface. But Bessie anticipated nothing of this, and watched the amusing scene with absorbing attention, and then she fell to speculating as to the possibility of climbing that beautiful mountain. But she was not to be left to her own cogitations any longer.

Poor Barnes, after meeting with the rebuff before mentioned, had retired straightway to a monstrous coil of rope at the taffrail, and there he had coiled himself to pass the time with a book. But somehow reading had no charms just then, and the time seemed very

tedious. He strove to beguile it by picturing the delightful days in store at the sea-side, where he might be almost daily beside one who was never absent from his thoughts. From thinking of Bessie he fell very naturally to dreaming of her, and, in fact, slept sweetly for a lengthened space. He was awaked abruptly from his blissful visions by a sensation as of the solid earth giving way beneath him. Opening his eyes with a spasm of horror he beheld a grim sailor, holding one end of the coil of rope whereon he had been peacefully slumbering, and preparing, as it appeared, to give another haul without loss of time.

Barnes heaved himself with some difficulty into an upright position, while the sailor, with a good-humoured grin which did duty on his countenance for a smile, observed, "Ax your pardon, sir, but you was so sound, hollerin' warn't no sort o' use, so I made bold to hitch the rope like." Thus was the long-suffering youth cast adrift once more; but on taking a survey of the situation he perceived, with a sigh of satisfaction, that land was in sight, and indeed very near, since the steamer, having rounded the headland, was rapidly making up to the landing-place.

After some reconnoitering Barnes caught

a view of Bessie, leaning over the bulwarks, all alone. So steadying his large anatomy as well as his want of sea-legs permitted, he forged slowly towards her. So rapt was she that he stood beside her for fully half a minute before she was conscious of a companion; and then she was first made aware of Barnes's proximity by an enormous sigh, like a blast from a pair of bellows. When Barnes, encouraged by Bessie's glance of recognition, observed that he could be very happy passing his days in such a peaceful spot, he really uttered his conviction. It seemed to him at that moment that he could, with perfect satisfaction, take up his final abode in the bosom of Ravensbay if only the person whom he so ardently admired might be always as near to him as she then was.

But with Bessie such a suggestion found no favour. Beautiful and romantic as was Ravensbay, yet she could never fancy it as a home.

After a month or six weeks of exile, however sweet, she felt that her heart would long for the little sitting-room in the narrow street, which was beautiful to her by the daily presence of the one man who was now the dearest in the world. Yes, Brand was her dearest

now, though for a short time his image had been displaced, and another had reigned in her heart. But this was all over. She had put away all thought of that other, though to part from him had been so bitter. And that little room in the dingy suburb had been the scene of that sorrow and this triumph over it; and in that room was centred all her interests and affections for the present and future, as well as for the past. It was her home, and any other place, however beautiful, could establish only a passing interest in her mind.

To Barnes's gushing remark she only replied, "Do you think so?" not caring to share her reasons for thinking otherwise with him.

"Oh!" said Barnes, now fairly under weigh, "how sweet and peaceful to dwell among these woods and glens, away from the bustle of smoky towns, and all the ceaseless clamour of a money-making world, and pass one's days with the one being on earth dearest—"

Here the gushing youth was brought up short by a voice close behind them exclaiming,—

"Here they are!"

Turning round he beheld Tots and Basil, both looking cross and bored, and appearing

to hail the presence of Barnes and Bessie as a relief from one another's company. In truth, this happy pair had had but a poor time of it, and their faces expressed their feelings pretty accurately.

Tots had made up her mind at the commencement of the voyage that it would be great fun to tease Basil a little, by entering upon a flirtation with Saunders Onslow, who, for his part, was by no means backward in making himself agreeable. A very little encouragement sufficed to make him take up his station by her side; and the two straightway fell into an animated conversation, carried on in low tones. Basil, perceiving that the object of his affections was so entirely occupied in making herself agreeable to another man, proudly walked away, disdaining to display any anxiety to displace Mr. Onslow. Not so far away, though, but that he could see all that went on.

Accordingly it was Saunders who fetched his own rug to fold round Tots's feet; it was Saunders who brought her a glass of wine when she complained of a headache; and he it was also who procured her a book wherewith to beguile the tedious hours. But they neither of them read anything, nor had the

least intention of so doing. The book served but as a pretext to lay their two foolish heads together and talk nonsense, which they did for a surprising length of time without getting tired of the amusement. Basil had already suffered one or two snubs from Tots, and at such continued provocation he grew much irritated. Finally he withdrew to the bridge, and turning his back upon the offending pair, he sat on the paddle-box and smoked moodily. Here, however, he was not to be left in peace. On a camp-stool beside the paddle-box sat Uncle Rob, very much at his ease, a newspaper in his hand, and a cloth travelling-cap of voluminous size and eccentric make tied down over his ears. Seeing Basil alone and smoking, with anything but an expression of placid contentment on his face, he concluded that the young people had been having a little breeze, and that Basil had been perhaps dismissed from his lady's side in disgrace. Ever ready for a mild joke, Uncle Rob felt that here was too good an opportunity to let slip; so he rose from his camp-stool and conveyed himself to Basil's side.

"Well, my Squire of Dames!" he began, "why so melancholy? Come, cheer up man!"

Basil turned hastily and beheld a malicious

twinkle in the old gentleman's eyes, which still further exasperated him. Why couldn't they let a fellow alone, he thought. His feelings towards Uncle Rob at that moment were not of the most affectionate nature. Nevertheless he replied, with a ghastly effort at hilarity, that he was not in the least melancholy; in fact, had never felt so cheerful in his life.

"But what has become of the ladies?" persisted Uncle Rob. "Surely they are not all ill?"

Basil felt guilty of wishing that they were all ill, very ill indeed, so much did he feel aggravated with the sex in general; but he was constrained to reply that, on the contrary, they were all very well, he believed.

"Oh," said Uncle Rob, in the sympathetic tone of one who divines the secret of another's grief, "don't be down-hearted, my boy, if your chosen one frowns! When you come to my age you will have learned by experience that there is no comprehending the endless variety of a woman's whims."

Now this was too bad of Uncle Rob, inasmuch as he had been for many years blessed with the sweetest little wife that ever fell to the lot of ungrateful man. But it was one

his little weaknesses to talk in his facetiously confiding moods, as if he were the most hen-pecked of husbands, and the most long-suffering of men, whose life was rendered a burden to him by reason of his domestic miseries. One day, when Tots, in answer to a burst of comic lamentation on his part concerning the woes of being fast tied to the most aggravating of her sex, who never would leave him a moment's peace, told him that his sorrows seemed to agree with him very well since they never made him thinner, he replied with a melo-dramatic sigh, and patting his portly waistcoat the while, "Ah! my dear, that is because I am bloated with misery!"

Doubtless had Uncle Rob accused Basil of being bloated with misery at that particular moment, he would have repudiated the base insinuation with scorn. And yet he was miserable enough. It is sufficiently aggravating when the object of one's affections chooses to lavish her smiles upon another, especially when that other is "a contemptible puppy," as Basil mentally designated the unconscious Saunders. But when, on the top of all this, is heaped the ignominy of being facetiously pitied, and humorously consoled,—then indeed it becomes too much, and life grows

bitter. Uncle Rob, finding his condolences thus coldly received, returned to his newspaper, and soon, spectacles on nose, was again buried in its depths, not to be roused thence until the bell rang, summoning all hands to dinner. Then indeed he sprang up with an alacrity surprising in one so bloated with misery; and without waiting to ask the pleasure of his future nephew-in-law's company, he scuttled down the ladder and vanished into the recesses of the cabin. To Basil's credit be it spoken, he resolved to give the recusant Tots one more chance of returning to her allegiance, by inviting her to go down with him; and with that purpose in view he again approached the absorbed pair. It was in a voice of much politeness that Basil summoned his lady-love to descend with him to the cabin, though he smothered his anger with difficulty on observing the close proximity of the two, and the entire gratification which each appeared to experience in the other's society. Tots calmly replied to his invitation, that she did not intend to leave the deck where she was so comfortable, and that in fact Mr. Onslow had persuaded the steward to bring them something to eat there, where it was so much more pleasant.

"But,"—she added,—“do not let us keep you, pray, if you wish to go down.”

So Basil turned his back on them, and went down fuming with suppressed vexation.

At length, however, Tots found herself deserted by her cavalier, who sauntered off in search of variety, leaving the young lady disconsolate, and not altogether satisfied with herself.

Basil returned to the deck and saw her sitting alone, but made no attempt to join her. She began to fear she had gone too far and had vexed him seriously; then in order to stifle regret, and drive dull care away, she did her best to read.

Presently Sophy found her, and would have talked; but Tots, being cross, snubbed her, and she went away. At length, as they drew near their destination, Basil crossed over to her, with displeasure on his brow, and evidently primed with a lecture. Tots, perceiving this, mentally took up the cudgels, and prepared to defend herself, rather than submit ignominiously to be found fault with. Hence, when he complained, she retorted, and matters were by no means improved by this effort to set things straight. At last, after an uncom-

fortable conversation, the two, finding little satisfaction in each other's society, were glad to join Barnes and Bessie.

"I am so awfully bored," said Tots, taking care to speak loud enough for Basil to hear. "Are not you, Bessie?"

"No," said Bessie, "but I shall be glad to land, notwithstanding."

And in due course they did land; and their ruffled feelings and weary frames were temporarily soothed by the inviting aspect of a well-spread tea-table in No. 2, Promenade Terrace.

CHAPTER VIII.

“WHAT a place!” said Saunders, as, on the following morning, some of the party sat grouped on the shingle, lazily watching the receding tide. “What a primitive little hole we have lighted on, to be sure! When I took my walks abroad this morning to explore a little, before breakfast, I assure you I did not meet a soul; unless I may be allowed to except three drapers who were taking a matutinal walk, and discussing politics the while.”

“Of course not,” said Sophy, who had taken one of her sudden and violent dislikes to Saunders Onslow, and made a point of differing from him on every occasion: “people don’t come to the sea-side with the express purpose of rushing about the streets at such early hours; but probably you would have seen numbers of people on the shore, had you looked there for them.”

Saunders loftily ignored Sophy's interruption, looking upon her as a troublesome child, with whom it was not worth his while to argue, and addressed his graphic remarks entirely to Tots.

"You may believe me," he continued, "the High Street was peopled with a perfect crowd, consisting of three pigeons and a lame dog ; though, to be sure, once or twice I caught sight of a sleepy shop-boy, yawning on the threshold of his master's premises."

"How exciting !" said Tots languidly, for she was not paying much attention, and her eyes kept looking round restlessly, as if on the look-out for some one. But Saunders, who was lying on his back at her feet, in an attitude of luxurious ease, did not observe her pre-occupation ; nor did even the suspicion cross his mind, that the charm of his conversation was scarcely appreciated.

"And the pavement," he continued, "is something quite unique. Imagine a series of petrified apple-dumplings, of various sizes and eccentric shapes, and you have the funny little streets of Ravensbay. I assure you, the injury done to my best boots in threading their way along such a novel surface, surpasses description !"

"People are not supposed to go about at the sea-side dressed up in their best boots," put in Sophy, noways abashed by the inattention which her former remarks had received. "And I have no doubt that the good people of this pretty little place would be mightily offended, if they heard you comparing their pavements to apple-dump-lings."

"They should consider themselves honoured by my taking the trouble to criticize them," returned Saunders, doing his best to get up a contemptuous smile, with his face upside down.

"Ah!" said Sophy, whose sharp little tongue sometimes ran away with her discretion, "I am afraid in this remote part of the world they are not educated up to the mark of feeling properly gratified by the condescending notice of Mr. Saunders Onslow!"

In the wide open window of No. 2, Promenade Terrace, sat Aunt Patty, knitting in hand, from which however she frequently glanced towards the expanse of blue water, which she loved so much—(at a respectful distance). Feeling still languid, from the trying experiences of the day before, she had withstood all entreaties to go out in the fore-

noon, so she had the house all to herself, and sat in the window, well contented, having her beloved girls in sight, as they grouped on the beach at no great distance.

Bessie, with idle hands but busy brain, sat gazing over the water, thinking who shall say what absorbing thoughts. Yet, she was not weaving romances, such as young girls love to do; for was not her romance for ever ended? So, at least, she was constantly telling herself. Yet, notwithstanding this melancholy fact, her thoughts could not have been altogether sad, for her face, though grave, was not sorrowful.

Sophy had armed herself with drawing materials, for she was one of those restless creatures, who must have their fingers always occupied with something, and who never seem to understand the luxury of complete idleness. She was at this moment engaged in making a sketch of Barnes, as he had appeared the night before, supporting Bessie along the precarious little wooden pier whereon they had been obliged to land, as the tide was out. One of his arms was represented, tenderly folded round a sheaf of umbrellas, wherewith he dexterously spiked all the unfortunate beings who got incau-

tiously within range. The other arm, besides supporting Bessie, was loaded with two hat-boxes (his own and his brother's), to say nothing of a terrifying amount of shawls. So engrossed had Sophy been in her occupation, that for a long while she remained perfectly silent—an unusual circumstance with her, betokening great absorption. Indeed they had all felt too lazy to talk, till Saunders Onslow, strolling along the beach, had joined their group of three, and laid himself gracefully at Tots's feet, with the amiable intention of making himself as irresistible as possible. Tots had received him but indifferently; for that morning her heart was somewhat heavy. The little coldness between herself and Basil, begun the day before on the voyage, had not been explained away; nor had any reconciliation been effected.

Tots had never doubted that Basil would be driven to despair by her coolness to him, and her amiability to Saunders Onslow; and that he would be sure to make the first advance by entreating to be told wherein he had offended, and imploring her to forgive his crossness on board, and make it up again. She had arranged the whole scene in her mind, to take place before breakfast that very

morning; and in order to afford Basil an opportunity of doing what was expected of him, she got up early, and was down fully half an hour before any one else. Basil was always first in the morning, so she doubted not that he would presently come in, and, discovering her alone, would thereupon express his extreme sorrow and contrition for having been so cruel and unreasonable. Tots had disposed herself gracefully in an arm-chair, resolved to be kind, but firm; and not to be in too great a hurry to restore her knight to favour. She would prolong the luxury of forgiving him, and then, when she thought he was wound-up to a sufficient pitch of anguish, she would relent—he should kiss her, and there it would all end. Thus, she flattered herself, they would be better friends than ever; and perhaps Basil, after such a little warning, would be less ready to take offence, and to show displeasure, another time. But alas for this deeply laid scheme! Basil came down stairs early, as she had foreseen, but instead of turning into the sitting-room, he had put on his hat and gone out of the house, not even glancing up at the window as he passed it. This had been a grievous disappointment. Then, when they

met at breakfast, he looked grave and pre-occupied, and was as far as possible from resembling a forlorn swain suffering under a sense of his lady's displeasure. When breakfast was over, he went out again, without offering to take the girls for a walk, or even asking what they meant to do with themselves. Saying that he was going to explore the rocks in order to find a good bathing-place, he disappeared, and remained absent for some hours. Tots perceived that she had gone too far in her foolish trifling; but this conviction, instead of urging upon her the necessity of making the first advance, which it was now very evident would not come from him, only rendered her sullen and vexed with herself, but at the same time nursing a secret feeling of injury against her lover. Had she possessed sufficient insight into character to read Basil aright, she would not have ventured in the first place to play with his feelings; nor would she have gone on, expecting him to soften, and be the first to entreat for reconciliation. Basil Hyde was not one whom it was very safe to offend. He was apt to be governed in all his actions by a strict sense of justice, and of what was due to his own feelings and sense of right, rather

than by a compassionate tenderness towards the offending person ; and as to Tots, being as he considered altogether in the wrong in this instance, he felt that simple justice required that she should suffer for her fault, and humbly confess it, before he would be justified in forgiving her. Tots flattered herself, as some foolish girls do, that she had unlimited power over her lover ; that his affection for her was so strong, that no amount of caprice on her part would suffice to alienate him, but that, on the contrary, by assuming airs of coldness and indifference sometimes, she could rivet his chains yet more closely. But she was greatly mistaken.

Basil Hyde would never bow to the petty tyranny of a small womanly nature, and he heartily despised the wiles by which inferior minds endeavour to establish an influence over the affections of others. A straightforward, lofty nature, candid as a mirror, and unswervingly truthful, he could look up to and worship ; and such a one he thought at first he had found in Tots. A more intimate acquaintance, however, revealed some traits in her character whose existence he had not even suspected ; but instead of treating the little caprices of a spoilt, wilful child with the

forbearing kindness which, in the end, would have bound her heart more firmly to his, he had suffered his disapprobation to appear undisguised, and by his somewhat stern reproaches in the first place, and his continuing an appearance of cold displeasure afterwards, he was alienating himself from her imperceptibly but surely.

When Bessie joined the party at Wareham, some little time before they started for the sea-side, she quickly detected that there was some secret dissatisfaction at work between the lovers. Yet it was impossible to discover any assignable cause. She tried once or twice to persuade Tots to confide in her, fancying that she might possibly smoothe the troubled waters of their courtship; but Tots would have none of her interference, and bade her, with more sharpness than gratitude, mind her own business. So Bessie desisted from her well-meant efforts, judging it best to let matters adjust themselves, as no doubt they would in time. Her thoughts were far away from Tots and Basil, as she sat absorbed upon the beach that sunshiny morning. She had schooled herself to exclude Basil from her day-dreams, and shut him out from her mind, and had forced herself into an entirely

different train of thought. The dreamy wash of the waves breaking at her feet soothed her, and seemed, in its calm monotony, to foreshadow the sad and passionless, yet placid, future that was perhaps in store for her.

Tots sat silent also, yet from far different causes. Her clouded brow would have surprised the eloquent Saunders, had he but observed it; but he was too much wrapped up in the consciousness of his own fascinations to notice anything amiss. Besides, Tots had smiled upon him when he first appeared; for, being weary of her own thoughts, she was ready to welcome almost anything as a diversion.

After a while, she became amused in spite of herself with Saunders' nonsense; and, glancing down at his upturned face as he lay supporting his head upon his arm, she beguiled the time by drawing comparisons between the handsome face so near to her, and the pale, stern one from whom she had coldly parted that morning. Certainly Saunders was very handsome, and few could look at him once without wishing for a second glance; moreover, he understood so well how to use to the best advantage the

weapons with which Nature had endowed him, that it was not an easy matter to resist them, when he had a mind to be fascinating. They had the conversation all to themselves, these two, for Bessie was as unconscious of their presence as if they had been elsewhere, while Sophy, having satisfied her mind by snubbing Saunders, and having, as she flattered herself, "taken him down a peg," paid no further attention to anything he thought proper to advance, but became involved in the intricacies of Barnes's profile, and struggled for a long time ineffectually with the pose of his lengthy person.

At length Tots's ear, quick because expectant, caught the sound of a footstep on the shingle behind them, and, although a perverse impulse withheld her from looking up, her "prophetic soul" told her it must be Basil. He it was who now joined the little group, but, disregarding a vacant space on his lady-love's unoccupied side, which she had vainly hoped he would choose, he threw himself down between Bessie and Sophy, as far away from Tots as he well could. After the first look, which had made him aware of the presence of "that intolerable puppy, Onslow," he appeared to ignore the presence

of Tots altogether, and withdrew a supercilious glance from Saunders, as if he regarded that young gentleman as quite beneath notice.

Bessie, roused from her abstraction, observed that Basil looked even paler than usual, and that he appeared fatigued and far from cheerful.

His first remark was a complaint of the weather, which, he said, was "grilling," and he pushed his straw hat from his forehead, with a weary, impatient gesture. In so doing, his aggressive elbow nudged Sophy's pencil, and caused Barnes's right arm to undergo a surprising contortion.

"Take care!" cried the artist, in great wrath. "You nudged me with your clumsy elbow!"

"Beg pardon," returned Basil shortly, and seeming by no means impressed by the magnitude of the evil he had wrought. Then he languidly stretched himself on his back behind Bessie, and drew his hat over his face, as though making arrangements for a nap; but in reality he had so placed himself as to keep a furtive watch on Tots and Saunders. The two were now engaged in very animated chat, for Tots, deeply resenting Basil's cold neglect of her, resolved to let him see that she also

citing flirtation on hand, the quiet sea-side life would have bored him.

Very shortly after our party left the beach, a tall spectral-looking youth "might have been seen" making his way towards the spot they had just left. This was Barnes, who for a great part of the morning had been encamped in a snug berth higher up the shingle, in sight of the group, whom he longed to join, but was withheld from so doing by the diffidence which always added a constraint to his manner, and gave an additional air of ungainliness to his awkward figure. Under cover of taking views of the landscape (for Barnes also was afflicted with the bad habit of trying to sketch) he had been in reality regaling himself with a pleasing view of his admired one's unconscious back; but, growing at last almost impatient of its unchanging expression, he had just screwed up his courage to the point of joining them, in order to have the felicity of beholding her face, when the group broke up and turned away towards the house.

The beach was now almost deserted—was left in fact to solitude, and Barnes, who then slowly rose, strode towards the spot they had occupied. It was marked by a

granite boulder, against which Sophy had supported her drawing-pad, and beside this great stone Barnes took up his position, as though he derived some comfort from the consciousness of sitting on the very spot hallowed by the recent presence of the unconscious Bessie. With a portentous solemnity, suggesting unutterable things, he arranged his sketch-book on his knees, and proceeded to sharpen his pencil with much care, as if with a view of employing it upon some subject too exalted to be lightly taken in hand. Having scraped at his pencil till its point was so fine as to be almost invisible, he viewed it with much complacency, and next proceeded to select a page, which should be also worthy of his theme. He appeared much exercised in his mind while making the important choice, fetching several deep sighs during the progress of his labours, as though he found his spirit too heavily burthened with the consciousness of his inability adequately to perform the task he had set himself. At length, having decided where to begin, he pushed back his straw hat, and directed a rapt gaze towards the deep blue sky above his head; seeking probably for the moon, from whose source all lovers are supposed to

derive inspiration. For lack of the moon, which was so unaccountably misguided as to be nowhere visible, the would-be artist fixed his eye upon a small fleecy cloud, sailing slowly above him ; and after watching it intently till it passed out of range, he once more turned his regard earthwards, with another sigh, calculated by its immense volume to blow away the boulder against which his left elbow was resting. Selecting the very centre of his page, he sketched thereon in the first place, a pair of arched eyebrows : and next laboured with immense concentration to produce a fitting pair of eyes. These eyes he desired should be characterized by that far-away look which he had frequently observed in Bessie's ; but, after infinite pains, the eyes, when developed, displayed a decided and facetious squint. This so materially detracted from the dreamy pensiveness which he longed to see reproduced upon paper, that the unfortunate Barnes sighed again, in a manner yet more tempestuous than before, and with a reluctant hand, proceeded to efface his drawing.

The second attempt was more successful ; but still the expression inclined more to a savage glare than to a far-off gaze ; and this

was a fresh subject of distress to our persevering artist. After some cogitation he hit upon the expedient of softening their ferocity by the aid of long and curling lashes, each of which he defined with a distinctness and vigour which gave the effect of a deep trimming of fringe. Next Barnes proceeded to outline the nose. But here it may be said that his real troubles began. Bessie's nose was not easy to draw, being of no decided outline, though her best friends were obliged to allow that it inclined to be a member of the order called "snub."

Barnes, desiring above all things to adhere to the original, turned it up, but with so much zeal and so little grace that it looked as if capable of answering all the purposes of a peg to hang a hat upon. This was grievous. Certainly Bessie's profile, though faulty in an artistic point of view, presented nothing which so outraged all sense of beauty, and Barnes, much disgusted with his lamentable failure, effaced the offending feature with a violence which threatened to rub a hole in the paper.

After half-an-hour's patient labour, his sketch was finished; and after a variety of finishing touches, he held it at arm's

length, in order to judge of the effect at a distance.

It may be concluded that the result was not altogether satisfactory, for the artist sighed deeply several times while contemplating his handiwork, sadly conscious, no doubt, that his feeble efforts had failed to do justice to the beloved features.

While thus engaged, Barnes became aware of approaching footsteps, and, looking up, he beheld Uncle Rob, slowly making his way from the direction of the rocks, where doubtless he had spent his morning with much satisfaction to himself. Uncle Rob, recognizing Barnes, walked up to him with a cordial greeting, for the kind-hearted doctor had a sort of tenderness towards the overgrown youth, whose languid movements and hollow cheeks spoke too truly of indifferent health. Possibly Uncle Rob's kindly sentiments were grounded on the conviction that Barnes would make an interesting subject for medical skill and science. However the good old fellow had sufficient penetration to discover that beneath the shy, awkward exterior, some really noble qualities of head and heart lay concealed.

Even to Barnes, who was wondrously slow

in arriving at his conclusions generally, it was quite evident that the old gentleman had been geologizing ; for in one hand he carried the little hammer, without which he was rarely known to go out when at the sea-side, while with the other he balanced an unsteady-looking pile of pebbles and broken flints. Fearful of losing any of his treasures by an unwary movement, which would have infallibly precipitated the whole at his feet, the old gentleman proceeded at a slow and cautious pace, and, as he stood in front of Barnes, he rested the precious heap against his waistcoat for further security. But poor Barnes, who seemed fated to bring misfortune upon himself and others, lifted himself into an upright position suddenly, in order to greet Uncle Rob with proper respect, and, in so doing, he contrived to bring his long arm in contact with the carefully-arranged pyramid of specimens, sweeping them all away at one blow. It would have touched even a less susceptible heart than Barnes possessed, to see the old gentleman's look of surprise and dismay as he beheld his pets, which it had taken him a whole morning to collect, thus profanely scattered. But gentle and sweet-tempered at all times, no provocation, even

so great as this, could force from him a word of reproach. He only observed with a sorrowful shake of the head, "Young man, young man, you do not know the wonders contained in those things, to which you pay so little heed."

"Sir," stammered poor Barnes, "indeed I—I regret, extremely,"—but here, finding words fail him, it seemed to occur to his mind that the evil might possibly be remedied. He therefore let himself down on his knees, and began diligently searching among the stones for the scattered treasures. Uncle Rob watched him, but not having his spectacles on, he did not perceive very clearly what sort of specimens Barnes was heaping together. However, in all faith and confidence he held out both hands and, with a grunt of satisfaction, he received into them a bigger heap than ever, which Barnes poured out with a triumphant air. But it so happened that while stooping to repair the mischief he had done, Barnes let fall his drawing-book, which sprawled open at the very page wherein he had delineated Bessie's loved countenance with such infinite pains.

Whilst he was having his fallen treasures restored, Uncle Rob's eye was caught by the

picture, which, being on a large scale, was plainly visible to him, even without spectacles. Happily for the old gentleman's peace of mind, there was no resemblance whatever to the original, either in feature or expression, notwithstanding that the artist had decided that "there certainly was a striking look somewhere." To Uncle Rob it appeared merely the portrait of a somewhat scraggy young lady, glaring with an air of sorrowful ferocity through cascades of eye-lashes. Ever ready for a mild joke at any one's expense, Uncle Rob hereupon observed with a knowing smile, "Ho, ho, I see what you do on the beach all the morning, Mr. Barnes! Drawing the young lady's portrait, eh? and what a pair of eyes she has! Come, tell me who she is now? I promise not to let on to the old woman." (Thus it was that Uncle Rob irreverently designated his wife.)

Barnes straightway fell into an agony of bashful confusion, dreading lest Uncle Rob had divined his secret, and at the same time almost longing to unburden his heart to the kind old man, from whom he had always experienced much sympathy. But Uncle Rob, beholding his embarrassment, pitied him, and forbore to carry the joke further.

So bidding the unfortunate swain carry his portrait home, and send it, scented with lavender, to the lady of his affections on the ensuing Valentine's Day, he turned homewards, incited thereto by a certain sensation in the region of his waistcoat, powerfully suggestive of several hours' abstinence. During his walk to his own door, his mind being on gastronomic thoughts intent, he did not glance again at his restored pets, till safely ensconced in his particular arm-chair. There, he spread them out on his knees, while the "old woman" and the girls crowded round to see and admire. Then, and not till then, did he perceive that Barnes, in his ignorance and enthusiasm, had gathered together a heap of worthless stones, with only here and there one of his lost treasures, which had got in among the rest by accident. Aunt Patty, enormously tickled by his look of blank consternation, fell forthwith into a most unfeeling fit of laughter, wherein she was joined by Bessie and Sophy; until Uncle Rob, deafened and indignant at finding himself the object of this burst of female derision, put his fingers into his ears and groaned in spirit. When a momentary cessation afforded him an opportunity to introduce a word in

his own defence, he observed severely that if they had not set up such a cackling, he would long ago have explained to them the cause of his bringing home such a worthless collection of rubbish, after his long morning's work. But since they thought fit to make such a noise, he had altered his intention. Nor would he be persuaded by any female blandishments to relent in his stern determination. So they were fain to sit down to dinner in considerable curiosity, feeling assured that thereby hung an interesting tale, if they could only get at it, but doomed to remain in ignorance, while Uncle Rob enjoyed his food with a keener relish in consequence of their discomfiture. An exploring party to the rocks had been arranged over breakfast, and, as they were now half an hour behind time, having been kept waiting by the master of the house, it behoved them to despatch the meal with all speed, because, if they delayed in starting, they ran the risk of being overtaken by the returning tide, which completely covered a great part of the rocks at high water.

Now Uncle Rob loved not to be hurried, and the deliberation which he displayed threw the girls, especially Sophy, into a fever of

impatience. Aunt Patty, too, was all in a bustle, and tried to hasten her good man's movements by ejaculating at intervals, "Make haste, my dear! You had better not eat any more potatoes; they will give you indigestion!" And anon, "Have you nearly finished, love? shall we have the bell rung?" While the girls, delighted to tease him a little in their turn, kept making pointed allusions to the rapid approach of the hour when the tide might be expected to overflow the rocks.

Now there is probably nothing so aggravating to a hungry man who has come home with the full intention of indulging in a comfortable meal, as to find himself the centre of a knot of excited and non-hungry females all in a bustle to be off somewhere, especially if it is their fixed intention to drag their unlucky victim along with them, without giving him time to eat as much as he wants, or even to digest what little he has eaten. Uncle Rob was, perhaps, the most long-suffering of men, but he was a man nevertheless, with all a man's hatred of being hurried over meals, and even his mild temper was roused at length by these repeated aggravations. When Aunt Patty for

the third time inquired if the bell should be rung, in order to have the things removed, he laid down his knife and fork, shook his fist with an indignant menace at the company generally, and burst into an eloquent complaint concerning the extreme aggravatingness of womenkind, adding, "Get along with you then, and put on your flimsy hats ! Basil and I will go on till the last moment."

Basil, who had finished long before, laughed, and made a feint of beginning again ; whereupon the ladies bade a merry adieu to the two gentlemen, and hurried away to prepare for their excursion. Uncle Rob kept his word, and although it was quite half an hour before his womenkind returned (by reason of the extreme difficulty which Aunt Patty experienced in deciding whether she should put on laced or spring-side boots, determining finally to wear the laced ones which always took ten minutes to put on), yet when they did return to the sitting-room, resplendent in cool dresses and expansive hats, they found Uncle Rob still sipping his wine with lazy enjoyment.

"What ! ready so soon ?" he cried in pretended amazement. "Bless my soul !

what has the old woman got on her head ? ”

This latter exclamation was elicited by the sight of a sun-bonnet of novel design and surprising dimensions, proudly borne aloft by Aunt Patty, who had mounted it for the first time, feeling confident that it was sure to meet with her husband's approval.

Great was her chagrin, therefore, when he fell into a spasm of irreverent laughter, after having recovered the first shock of astonishment.

When you don a new article of attire for the first time with the pleasing conviction that it is truly becoming, and cannot fail to meet with the approbation of all beholders, it is certainly trying to be received with cries of astonishment and derision ; and poor Aunt Patty, assailed in such a tender point, was on the verge of an indignant rejoinder, and had blushed up with a determined air, preparatory to entering on a defence of her maligned head-dress, when all her anger was put to flight, by a tender and apologetic look from her spouse.

Kind-hearted Uncle Rob, who could never carry a joke so far as to really wound anyone, seized with a spasm of compunction,

walked up to the injured little woman, and putting his arm round her neck, bestowed upon her a resounding kiss. In the tender action he crushed the offending bonnet out of all shape; but serenely unaware of this circumstance and quite restored to her usual sweetness by the caress, Aunt Patty, followed by her flock, emerged on to the sands, and the whole party set off.

Sky and sea smiled upon them. The faint, fresh breeze fanned them pleasantly, and good humour and happiness reigned supreme in all but two members of the party. Tots, who, during dinner, had displayed a nervously animated manner, suggestive of forced high spirits, attached herself to the side of Uncle Rob, with whom she chattered, and upon whom she lavished all her sweet smiles. She was determined, apparently, to show Basil that she cared nothing for his estrangement, and he, for his part, made no attempt to force his society upon her, but perseveringly walked with Bessie, while Sophy and Aunt Patty brought up the rear.

They lingered on the way, for the beauty of the afternoon was enticing, and Aunt Patty, never a fast walker, had a little peculiarity of periodically pausing and taking a look round

“to admire the prospect,” as she always said ; but this was merely a transparent *ruse* for resting and taking a fresh stock of breath ; and as Sophy, who was one of the most unselfish of beings, notwithstanding the frequent sharpness of her remarks, made no sort of difficulty about proceeding at such a slow pace, it came to pass that, in a little while, the couple fell behind.

Basil, taking huge strides with those long legs of his, which were frequently compared by Sophy to a pair of compasses, hurried Bessie along, while he kept up an interesting stream of talk, in which she soon grew animated, and sustained a creditable share. Basil rather prided himself on being able to draw Bessie out ; for it was not by any means on the general public that she lavished her conversation, but only upon the few with whom she could feel at ease. This was simply the result of a certain amount of shyness and reserve which was so inherently a part of her nature that, until she had established an intimacy with any one, she experienced a sort of difficulty in receiving and communicating ideas. It was this which had first attracted Basil ; for he loved that women should be retiring in their demeanour, and with Bessie he found

that, upon further acquaintance, he was able to draw forth conversational powers which lay, unsuspected by the many, beneath such a quiet exterior. And now it seemed almost as if, growing weary of the shallower mind and capricious disposition of his betrothed, the old spell of Bessie's attractive influence were beginning once more to assert itself.

In conversing with her the gloom which had hung so heavily on his brow during the last day or two gave place to something of his former warmth and animation.

Wholly absorbed in talk, they were unconscious of the flight of time, and it was not until a sudden halt and backward glance revealed the fact that they had completely out-walked the rest of the party, and that the time had flown very pleasantly and quickly. Bessie awoke to a startling consciousness of the dangerous happiness she had been enjoying, and an uneasy sense of disloyalty to her sister took possession of her. She had longed many times during the last few days to bring about a reconciliation between the lovers, and it now flashed upon her that, if she could but persuade Basil to show renewed kindness to Tots, and so make up the unhappy coldness

which had arisen, it would in some sort make amends for her delinquency.

They had arrived at a beautiful little cove, almost shut in by rocky ramparts on either side, where a shingly beach shelved abruptly down to the water's edge. Bessie glanced round her, but with much indifference, although the beauty of the spot would at any other time have called forth her delighted admiration. Now, however, her mind ran upon other matters. Basil sat down upon a boulder, and was about to draw a book from his pocket in order to read some pet passages to her; but Bessie felt that if she meant to say anything at all it must be said at once, else all her courage would ooze away, and the temptation to lose herself again in the happiness of the moment would become too strong. But how to introduce the subject? It is a difficult, and not always a wise proceeding to interfere between lovers; and Bessie particularly shrank from doing anything that might appear meddling or uncalled for. Yet, in this instance, might she not help to restore matters to a happier footing by a well-timed word, and if so, should she not hereafter blame herself if she now neglected to say that word through a false timidity? Basil, seeing she

was not inclined for reading, put away his book, and sat with his elbows on his knees, and his chin supported by his hands, gazing out to sea.

He did not help her to begin the subject, but appeared suddenly to have fallen into an abstracted mood, and she did not like to disturb his thoughts. The tide had turned, and was rapidly coming up, not "creeping o'er the sands," but edging round semi-submerged rocks, and making its impetuous way to their feet by swift strides. So completely were the two shut in by rock and sea that it seemed as if they had the whole world to themselves, and no sound disturbed their murmured conversation, save the swish of the rapidly advancing water. Bessie found herself talking at first to an apparently inattentive listener, for Basil did not change his position, nor offer any remark; nor even when she stopped, embarrassed and half frightened, did he make any answer for a time. It seemed almost as if his whole thoughts were fixed on the approaching tide. He turned to her at last, looking pale and grave, but evidently not angry as she had begun to fear. He turned the conversation, however, and set off upon other subjects, so that Bessie felt she had no

right to say more. She felt disappointed and sad, for she had hoped to hear Basil say something kind, or make some definite promise that he would lay aside his vexation against Tots. But he did not, and Bessie feared lest he felt secretly annoyed with her for interfering. She tried to talk and feel interested, as she had done during the walk ; but it almost seemed as if the atmosphere had changed, and she shivered with the chilliness of disappointment and failure.

Meanwhile the tide had risen so fast as almost to cut off their retreat along the shore, and they had barely sufficient time to quit the cove before the waves washed up to and surrounded the very spot where they had been sitting. The return walk was silent and constrained, and it was a relief to both when they came in sight of the rest of their party ; of three of them at least, for Uncle Rob was nowhere to be seen, he having doubtless wandered off, hammer in hand, to discover fresh geological wonders. Nor were these three sociably together. The spirit of disunion seemed to possess the little party that afternoon. Resting on the soft grass some distance above and beyond the returning wanderers, two figures reposed which Bessie's

sharp eyes recognized as Aunt Patty and Sophy, while, seated on a big stone at the water's edge, was solitary Tots in an attitude of dejection unusual with her, and looking like a lonely sea-bird awaiting the return of its mate. Basil turned from Bessie's side and made his way towards his betrothed, and Bessie, with a heavy heart, approached Aunt Patty and Sophy. As she drew nearer, she perceived that something or other was amiss, and quickening her pace she was soon beside them, and startled to see her aunt's face, at the end of her sun-bonnet, looking very pale, and exhibiting traces of alarm or suffering.

"Auntie, what is it?" she cried, dreading to hear that some dreadful accident had befallen Uncle Rob. "What has happened?"

Aunt Patty strove to get up a smile, but only succeeded in evoking its wan ghost; while Sophy, giving her no time to open her mouth, poured into Bessie's astonished ears a whole broadside of explanations.

"Uncle said he was going to geologize, and that we had better be independent of him as he would perhaps walk a longer distance than aunt could manage without being tired. So we sat down among the rocks with Tots for a little while, and talked and watched the tide

coming in, and amused ourselves with wondering where you and Basil had gone off to together. But Tots seemed so hugely cross that we could do nothing with her ; whatever has come over her I can't think ! So I proposed to Auntie to climb up here to this nice, grassy place, as we might perhaps get a glimpse of Uncle Rob from this height ; but you see we have only succeeded in putting ourselves out of sight of everybody, for we can't even see Tots where we are now, and—"

"Yes, but—" interrupted Bessie, "something has happened ! Aunt Patty, you are hurt, I am afraid."

"Nothing, my dear, nothing," said the kind little woman, anxious to soothe her niece's alarms. "Only I have somehow given a twist to my ankle."

"Not sprained it, Aunt, I do hope !" exclaimed Bessie in great distress.

"No, my dear, indeed ; you may set your mind at rest, it is nothing so bad as that. A day or two's rest will set it right again."

"But," said Sophy, all in a flutter, and never silent for long, "Aunt can never walk home without somebody's help, and it is quite impossible to tell where Uncle may have wan-

dered off to, or when he may turn up again ; and I am sure we ought to get her home as quickly as possible, for it may be getting worse, you know. Whatever shall we do, Bessie ? ”

“ Basil will come and take aunt home,” said Bessie. “ Go, Sophy, quickly ! You will find him somewhere down among the rocks with Tots ; tell him to come directly : I will stay with Aunt while you are away.”

Off went Sophy like a flash ; always quick in her movements, she was down the slope and out of sight in no time, while Bessie set herself to comfort poor Aunt Patty, and hear from her a more coherent account of the afternoon’s adventures. In a wondrously short time, which, however, to the two waiting ones, seemed wearily long, Basil came in sight striding up the slope, with Sophy toiling a little behind, for even she, with all her agility, found it difficult to keep pace with him. He was beside them in another minute, his face full of sympathy and his strong arm ready to carry Aunt Patty home, if necessary ; but happily the matter was not so bad as that. After the first few steps, Aunt Patty was able to walk with less pain than she had expected, but they were obliged to progress slowly

in order to let her frequently rest. Bessie lingered behind, hoping that Tots would make her appearance and walk home with them; for as yet she was invisible. Waiting for her failed to bring her however, and Bessie did not care to go down among the rocks after her, as she wished to reach home the same time as Aunt Patty in order to nurse the poor injured foot.

Sophy, seeing Bessie loiter, and divining the reason, ran back to join her, with a face brimful of portentous intelligence, which she was evidently dying to communicate.

"Oh, Bess!" she cried, "it is no manner of use your waiting for Tots; depend upon it she won't come till she has a mind to! She seems to be in a most highly-wrought frame of mind. I really should not care to go too near her lest she might pour out upon me the vials of her wrath and grief!"

"How do you mean?" said Bessie, bewildered. "Wrath and grief!"

"Yes," said Sophy, "I said 'wrath and grief,' and I stick to it. Really, lovers do seem to be the most uncomfortable sort of people! Guess how I found this lamentable couple when I went to call Basil."

"Why, how? tell me," said Bessie; her

heart sinking within her in dread lest her interference had only brought things to a worse pass than before.

“Well,” continued Sophy, evidently relishing the having a story to tell, though it was of a melancholy nature, “I found them like a pair of pelicans among the rocks, at the water’s edge. Whatever Basil had been saying to Tots I can’t think! Perhaps he had been administering a little wholesome rebuke, though I rather incline to think he was catching it himself. He was bending over her, and she was weeping tempestuously. (I hope she armed herself with a host of handkerchiefs before leaving the house!) Basil seemed watching his opportunity to get a word in, and she carefully contrived that he should not have a chance; for she seemed doing all the talking herself, as well as all the weeping. As I drew near I caught the words, ‘Not care for me any longer!—prefer Bessie’s society—had better go back to Bessie!’ But here I burst in and coughed spasmodically, and called out to Basil, for I did not care to make a third in lovers’ councils, especially when they seemed so far from soothing and delightful. Basil came directly; rather glad, I thought, to get away, and the last thing I

saw of Tots, as I looked back, was the pensive spectacle she presented as she sat looking for a dry corner on her handkerchief wherewith to wipe away a fresh torrent of tears. But you see, Bessie, she seems to cherish resentment against you for taking Basil off this afternoon. The idea! As if anybody wants her lanky lover!"

"Hush!" said Bessie in a pained voice.

And her peremptory tone silenced Sophy, who occupied her mind during the remainder of the walk home in cogitating concerning the woes of lovers in general; whence she fell to wondering whether it would ever be her melancholy privilege to have a lover all to herself.

Far different were Bessie's thoughts as she pursued her silent walk home. To indignation at the unreasonableness and absurdity of Tots's conduct succeeded a deep compunction, and much self-condemnation for having given any, even the slightest, colour of an excuse for such an accusation on Tots's part. She determined to have an explanation with her that very night, and not leave her till she had succeeded in proving the utter falseness of such a notion; and then surely Tots would be quite herself again—would see the injustice

she had done both her sister and her lover, and would gladly be reconciled with Basil. Then all would be right again, and once more they would be the happy family party that had embarked in such high hope so few days ago to spend a merry month at Ravensbay. All these cogitations were put to flight by their reaching home, whither Aunt Patty had preceded them by a few moments. Bessie found no more time to dwell on painful subjects till her aunt's comfort had been attended to, and by the time this was done it was very late, for they had lingered on the rocks beyond their usual tea-hour. Tots came in while Bessie was busy in her ministrations, and by the time Aunt Patty was restored to her usual serenity Uncle Rob entered, professing himself rabidly hungry, and demanding that a second dinner should be got ready immediately. Bessie left him to inquire into the extent of Aunt Patty's damage, while she went to give orders, and so it came to pass that no opportunity occurred for an explanation with Tots. All the party sat down to the concluding meal with very fair appetites, except Tots. She ate little, and looked very pale and heavy-eyed; but happily Uncle Rob was so taken up with attending upon and

comforting the "old woman" that these symptoms escaped his notice.

Directly after supper, the doctor's orders were that the "old woman" should instantly retire to bed, and Bessie accompanied her, leaving the party downstairs to their own devices. Her heart continued sad and uneasy, while she assisted Aunt Patty to undress, and bathed and bound up the ankle. But it was destined to be relieved of a great part of its burden before she laid down to rest that night.

She went last thing into the sitting-room to fetch some trifle for her aunt, and there, unseen herself, she beheld that which gladdened her unselfish spirit, and sent her upstairs again with a joyous conviction that at last all was well. The door stood ajar, so that her entrance did not disturb two persons who had the room all to themselves. Their faces were turned from her, and they were unaware of her momentary presence, and Bessie, fearful of being discovered, retired immediately. Not however before she had seen enough to prove that harmony was restored between the lovers, for Basil's arm was round Tots, who was weeping this time silently, not tempestuously; and his gently uttered words were all of affection and renewed tenderness.

CHAPTER IX.

“JUMP in, Tots ! Make haste ! Come, what are you stopping for ? ”

“It leaks,” objected the young lady addressed, regarding the boat which she was invited to enter with a distrustful gaze.

“Nothing of the kind,” returned Basil rather sharply. “Come, don’t be childish. See, you are keeping all the others waiting.”

“O Basil, I am afraid it will upset ! I don’t think I will go, indeed. I see the water rushing in ! ” and Tots made a retrograde movement, which immediately elicited a chorus of shrieks from Bessie and Sophy.

In order to explain the novel and somewhat absurd position in which these girls stood, preparatory to getting into the boat, it will be necessary to state that the boating arrangements at Ravensbay were by no means the best calculated to insure the com-

fort and happiness of unfortunate pleasure-seekers.

Although rowing was a most popular pastime, and the owners of pleasure-boats must have pocketed very fair profits at the end of every season, yet no citizen had yet been found sufficiently public-spirited to propose or carry out any improvements in the mode of embarking and disembarking.

The little wooden landing-stage, elsewhere referred to, terminated far short of low-water mark; and it was troublesome and roundabout to go to the harbour. The only accommodation which had been evolved out of the fertile brains of Ravensbay boat-owners for the convenience of their customers consisted of a few crazy forms, placed in a line from the edge of the water to the boat; and when the tide was out at its farthest, the united number of forms, belonging to the different boat-owners, was insufficient to cover the distance. The water was extremely shallow, and it was very difficult to bring a boat anywhere near to the dry sand. Frequently droll accidents took place, in consequence of the decrepit constitution of some of these forms, one or two of which were short of a leg, while all were in some degree

mutilated, and bore marks of old age and hard usage. Fortunately, one form was found in the neighbourhood of the boat to which they were about to consign their precious lives for a couple of hours or more. Happily also for them, the tide had commenced to flow; hence the one form, by judicious management, might have been made sufficient. Still it was not such an easy matter for them all to embark dry shod, for their frail plank had to be pushed some distance into the water before Basil could bring the boat's edge to touch it, and a yard or more of water, about ankle deep, flowed between the form and the spot where they stood. The tide moreover was rapidly rising, so that the distance increased every moment, and would shortly interpose an effectual barrier between them and the boat, if they did not promptly make up their minds to brave the perils of the transit.

Hence Basil calling from the boat, bade them be quick and get on the form, lest the intervening water should become too broad for them to step across; and he was ready to take them in, one by one. They were all three therefore standing in a row, on the most decrepit form of the whole lot, for although

outwardly it seemed trustworthy, and rejoiced in its proper complement of legs, yet so feeble was its anatomy, that the girls' united weight caused it to bend in the middle in a manner calculated to strike terror in the bravest female heart.

Now, as ill luck would have it, Tots was the first of the procession; therefore until she had been got into the boat, Bessie and Sophy were condemned to stand waiting on their crazy support, with the rising tide rapidly broadening and deepening the water in their rear. No wonder for Basil to feel a little aggravated by Tots's continued objections in such circumstances.

Truly the virtue of courage formed but a small proportion of Tots's character.

"I think I won't go—" she said, trembling with dread of some unknown catastrophe, sure to overtake her, if she trusted herself to the tender mercies of the deep in a boat wherein her sharp eyes had descried an insignificant puddle of water, and the terrified damsel made a step backwards, which exposed her sisters to the imminent peril of overbalancing. These two young women made an involuntary outcry, as Tots backed upon them, for if she refused to advance,

there was nothing for them but to plump into the water. Basil, seeing that words were thrown away, set one knee upon the bow; and stretching out a long arm, seized the lady of his affections with a grasp so powerful that she was constrained to obey the impulse, and spring into the boat. But at this very moment, a direful crash was heard, followed by shrieks from Bessie and Sophy, half of laughter, half of fright; and a fountain of salt water leaped up about the ears of Basil and his beloved one, sprinkling them plentifully.

The treacherous form had suddenly given way in the middle and let down poor Bessie and Sophy, who floundered into the water, and laughed heartily at their own expense. Basil, fearful of the consequences of a wetting, at first would have had them return to the house, but both protested that they would rather go on, no one ever caught cold from sea-water, and that they were not so very wet after all, with manifold arguments of a like nature, so that in the end they all took their places, and made ready for a fair start. Basil then took the oars, and pushed out into deeper water, leaving the form to its fate. Although our party had now been a fort-

night at the sea-side, yet strange to say, this was the first time they had ventured out for a row together. The sea had not always been calm enough to tempt them, for waves and ground-swells had terrors for them all. But the main difficulty had been Tots's fear of trusting herself to Basil's unpractised rowing. And she had declared that until he had practised for at least a week, she would rather remain on dry land, and with this Basil was forced to content himself. Since then, he had paddled about in the bay by himself, in order to satisfy Tots that he was perfectly skilled in the management of a boat. So it fell out, that the next calm day, when the sea presented a surface as level as a looking-glass, and as blue as a turquoise, a row was unanimously agreed on, and leaving Uncle Rob to "naturalize" among the rocks and Aunt Patty to amuse herself within doors, they set off.

Basil made wonderful play with his oars, and, for a little while, made the boat shoot through the water with a swiftness which instantly aroused in Tots's mind the conviction that all was over, and that they were destined to upset without a moment's further delay. Her blooming colour faded to a hue

which she would not have thought becoming could she have beheld herself at the moment. She grasped the edge of the boat with one hand, and Bessie's arm with the other, till that young woman was compelled to make an outcry against being pinched in so ruthless a manner.

"O Basil!" cried the terrified one, "don't go so fast! Oh! she is going over! We shall all be upset!"

But Basil, enjoying the exercise, and conscious of the groundlessness of Tots's fears, only laughed, thinking perhaps to inspire her with courage by appearing unconcerned.

"Very unfeeling of him!" thought Sophy; who, although she condemned Tots for being so very absurd, yet thought it behoved a lover to show more sympathy. But at last even Basil's muscular arms ached with his exertions, and he shipped his oars, and prepared to enjoy repose and comfort, by, in the first place, taking off his coat.

"What *are* you going to do?" exclaimed Tots, disturbed by a new source of disquietude; for it flashed across her that her beloved contemplated taking a header into the deep water.

"Why, nothing," said Basil cheerfully,

"Literally nothing. I mean to lie in the bottom of the boat, and get cool, and go to sleep after my exertions, and you girls may do the same, if you like."

"The idea!" cried Sophy: "he beguiles us out into the middle of the deep sea, and then leaves us to wobble up and down, while he takes his ease!"

"I have worked hard, madam; I have earned a rest," retorted the maligned hero. "And you might have expressed yourself more poetically by substituting 'rocked in the cradle of the deep,' for 'wobbling up and down!'"

"Not at all!" cried Sophy, who was not afflicted with a passion for poetry, and was more remarkable for being graphic than elegant in her speech. "Wobble is just the word that expresses my meaning; rocking would be rather pleasant, but the boat doesn't rock,—it wobbles."

"Stick to it," murmured Basil faintly, his voice coming from the bow of the boat, where his head reclined on the painter.

Bessie was quietly content, and almost happy. Seated luxuriously in the stern, she viewed to advantage the widely sweeping bay, and became lost in delighted contempla-

tion of the wooded and mountainous background, where cool, deep shadows lay under the distant foliage, and along the green hillsides. The sweet calmness around her, and the soft, soothing motion, lulled her into a reverie, wherein she became so rapt, as to be almost unconscious of the surroundings, and her thoughts (if thoughts they might be called which were only the involuntary play of imagination, picturing what might have been) disengaged themselves from present realities and carried her back into the past, and again forward into the dim future. Yet ever in her abstraction the sound was in her ears as of advancing waves breaking softly on a pebbly beach; yet inexorably creeping up, up, and around her, and breathing chilliness and gloom. She roused suddenly with a start, and found it was the water lapping sleepily against the sides and bow of the boat as it swung lazily with the tide. Tots also had been quiet for a long time. Finding her feelings greatly soothed by the cessation of Basil's efforts, she sought amusement in curling the feather of her hat with a pen-knife; for, as the day was very hot, it was pleasant to sit at ease, and let the soft air blow upon her. Deeply engrossed in her fascinating

employment, she allowed her lover to repose in peace at the bottom of the boat while she was involved in the intricacies of millinery. It happened however that this particular boat had a weakness for letting in water, though to no dangerous extent. Still it was necessary to insure comfort by baling at intervals. Now Basil, having carefully emptied the boat before he hoisted in his fair cargo, made up his mind that no more attention would be required for some time; so he laid himself down to rest with a tranquil mind. He was painfully aroused from his well-earned repose by the voice of his beloved uplifted in a shriek of alarm, the more startling from the complete silence that had reigned but a moment before.

“ Good gracious me ! what now ? ” he ejaculated, springing to a sitting posture with a motion as sudden as if he had been galvanized. But Tots was past speaking. In dumb dismay she pointed to the pool of water, now much increased, wherein, much to Basil’s disgust, he beheld his straw hat tranquilly floating. “ Well, take it out,” he said. “ It is provoking to be sure, but not worth making such an outcry about.”

But Tots had no thought of the damage to

the hat. All her dread was that in five minutes at the furthest the water would reach to their chins, and end by maliciously engulfing them.

Bessie navigated for the hat with the end of her parasol, and succeeded in landing it safely on the thwart. But Tots—her voice having returned—screamed piteously,—“Oh, Basil! the boat is sinking! I told you we should all be drowned!” and she broke into a paroxysm of tears and sobs.

Then did Basil wax impatient at the folly of his betrothed, and he desired her to make less ado, while he baled the water out.

“Don’t you see,” he continued, “that you add more water by crying? I do assure you there is not the least danger.”

“Poor hat!” said Bessie, as she held it up all dripping and forlorn; “how could you manage to let it come to such a pass?”

Basil, pausing in his occupation, looked up with half-amused consternation, while Sophy laughed outright, rather enjoying in anticipation the figure which the dignified Basil would cut, walking home without a hat, and his hair flying hither and thither like an agitated mop.

But to Tots, whose mind was full of the

apprehension that instant death awaited them, all this trifling seemed incomprehensible. With blanched face, and wide-open eyes, she watched Basil as he knelt busily at work, her fears increasing every moment with the rising breeze and rippling water.

Bessie, meanwhile, was endeavouring to shake and rub the unlucky straw hat into some faint resemblance of its former self, and Sophy was trying to get a view of pebbles and fishes over the boat side. Hence neither perceived her sister's agitation. But to poor Tots the situation seemed to grow more appalling every moment, and she was in fact on the point of giving utterance to her feelings in a scream, when it chanced that Basil looked up at her, partly to reassure her and sooth her evident terror by showing her that there was no cause for it; and partly, being amused at her exaggerated timidity, to exclaim laughingly,—

“What a little coward it is, to be sure!”

Bessie and Sophy looked round hastily, and Tots's feelings, brought to a climax by what seemed to her Basil's unfeeling conduct, found relief in a burst of hearty, and, as Sophy would have said, tempestuous crying. Basil looked first astounded, then perplexed,

and, finally, as the weeping grew more violent, distressed.

“Tots! Tots!” cried Bessie, “what is the matter? We will go home at once if you like, but don’t cry so.”

“Good gracious!” muttered Sophy *sotto voce*; “lovers never seem to be happy but when they are miserable.”

Now it happened that they had been slowly and almost imperceptibly drifting towards the rocks, under whose gigantic shadow the little boat now lay; while within a stone’s throw appeared an inviting little beach, entirely closed in on all sides except towards the sea by rocky walls. Its proportions were so miniature, that it looked as if it might have been scooped out of the cliff with a moderate-sized spoon. On the shingle the wavelets broke with a lazy murmur; and altogether there was a restful and soothing aspect about the spot which was very enticing. When Bessie spoke of returning home instantly, Tots only shuddered and cried the more, at the prospect of a long row back through a no longer motionless sea; but in the midst of her tears, her eyes caught sight of the haven so happily at hand.

“Oh! put me on shore there!” she cried,

as Basil, utterly confounded at the perplexing aspect of affairs, raised himself slowly from his knees, preparatory to doing something, he knew not what, for the consolation of his betrothed. Tots's request to be put ashore on the little beach seemed only to complicate matters further; for how could she be left there alone? And yet it was equally impossible for them all to land. It might be possible to get up the cliff, and so into the high road; but how in the world could they dispose of the boat? Basil stood up and took a careful survey of the situation, but the more he looked the more did difficulties present themselves.

"If we put you ashore here," he observed meditatively, "how could you get home?"

"Oh, we can all land," sobbed Tots; "and wait here till the tide will be out sufficiently for us to walk home by the rocks."

"Absurd," returned her lover decisively; "don't you see, the tide turned two hours ago, and is running in rapidly. Already the communication with the rock-path is cut off, and at high water the whole beach will be covered."

Bessie gazed round at the little cove with the feeling that she had somewhere seen it

before, or else dreamed of it; and meanwhile Tots continued, sobbing,—

“Put me on shore! do put me on shore!”

At last, Basil came to the conclusion that the best plan would be to land, and see if there were any way of getting home by the cliffs.

A few vigorous strokes of the oars impelled the boat to the shelving beach; then out he jumped, and pulled it yet higher, in order that the girls might land without any trouble. Tots tumbled out of the boat as soon as it was drawn up, with such precipitation, that she did not wait for Basil's helping hand, and in consequence nearly rolled back into the water.

Sophy stayed in the boat, observing, that as she intended going home by water, she did not see the force of getting out, all for nothing.

“You can't stop here till the tide goes down, you see, Tots,” said Basil, endeavouring to set the matter before her bewildered intellect in the clearest light. “Because, as the tide has first to come in, you will infallibly be washed away; but see here,” he continued, having caught sight of what looked like a winding path; “this seems to be a

sheep-track, and it zigzags up to the top of the cliff apparently. Once at the summit, you can get into the road, and after that all will be smooth sailing."

From Basil's way of speaking it was evident that he intended going back with the others, and leaving Tots on this lonely beach to find her way by herself. Dreadful idea! She clung to Basil's arm, entreating him to stay with her, until, much perplexed, he endeavoured to reason with her calmly.

"Be sensible, Tots, be sensible," he said, in a tone intended to be reassuring: "I must take the boat back, you see; we could not carry it along with us."

"Let Bessie and Sophy row it home," suggested she.

"Nonsense!" cried Basil, waxing impatient, "it is not to be thought of."

"Then do you row Sophy home," said Bessie, "and I will stay with Tots, and we can find our way up to the top of the cliffs, and home by the road."

Basil was instantly relieved from great perplexity. Certainly that would be the best, in fact the only plan. Tots, encouraged by Bessie's companionship, would lose all fear, and he himself, as soon as he had landed

Sophy, would walk along the road to meet them.

With this arrangement Tots was forced to be content, so Basil leaped back into the boat, and pushed off from the shore, waving his saturated hat as he did so, and calling encouragingly to the girls to take care of themselves; an injunction which Bessie felt, with some trepidation, they had no alternative but to obey.

Sophy, reclining very much at her ease in the stern, waved them a graceful farewell with her handkerchief. Then she turned her back upon the cove, and, unusually for her, fell into deep and thoughtful silence.

When at last Basil, wearied by his efforts, slackened his pace, and let the boat drift, while he took a look round, he found that his companion's eyes were fixed on him with an earnest gaze, as if she were striving to penetrate the inmost recesses of his mind.

"Well, my little philosopher," he said smilingly, "may I know what you are so busy perusing my countenance for?"

"I was thinking," said Sophy profoundly, "thinking of you and Tots."

"Indeed," he said, "and what was the

nature of your thoughts concerning Tots and myself?"

"I was thinking how curious it is that incongruous people so often fall in love with each other."

The smile passed away from Basil's face, and was succeeded by something like a frown.

"So," he said; "you consider Tots and myself incongruous, as you call it, do you?"

"Very," said Sophy. "How such opposites can expect to settle down in harmony for life, I don't know. I suppose your conflicting qualities will eventually dovetail, and so produce a harmony of some sort."

"I suppose so," returned Basil, snatching at the oars, and bending to them with such a will as to render all further discourse out of the question.

"I can scarcely distinguish them any more," said Tots tearfully, as the boat, at whose receding form she had been gazing, diminished rapidly.

"Don't let us waste any more time watching them," said Bessie; "the tide is coming up fast, see how rapidly it gains on the beach."

They walked to the foot of the cliff, and

surveyed the steep and winding ascent. For a little distance the path was distinct enough, but it grew more faint higher up, and sometimes disappeared ; finally, they lost all trace of it.

“I don’t see how we are to get up there,” said Tots. “Basil might have taken us for goats when he expected us to climb such a precipice !”

Bessie, who was leading, turned round, and extended a helping hand.

“Come, Tots,” she urged, “exert yourself for both our sakes. You never used to be so timid, it is only since we came to the sea-side that all your spirit seems to have forsaken you.”

“I never had any occasion for courage before,” observed Tots, and truly. It is on emergencies that the real character stands revealed, and Tots had not hitherto found herself in any situation requiring promptitude and courage. “I wish I could be braver,” she added with a dismal sigh ; “but everybody has not such iron nerves and such insensibility to danger as you have, Bess.”

To this Bessie replied not, but held on her resolute course, Tots holding on to her skirts, as to the last refuge of despair. For a while

they proceeded without much difficulty, for though the path was exceedingly steep, and every now and then they found it necessary to stop for breath, yet they encountered no insurmountable difficulties. When about half way up, however, they turned to glance below them, and then Tots's courage once more sank to zero. Certainly, viewed from above, the way they had come looked perilous in the extreme, and Bessie shuddered as she glanced below her, feeling her own courage give way a little.

"Don't look down!" she cried, "it will make you giddy; hold fast to me, there is no fear, if you will only step carefully."

Yet even as she spoke, her heart fluttered painfully as she realized that her own and her sister's safety absolutely depended on her firmness. So high had they climbed, that by this time, viewed from the beach, they would have resembled flies, clinging to the side of a wall, and yet they were not much more than half-way up.

"Keep up, Tots!" said Bessie, trying to steady her voice, that it might sound encouraging; but she felt that she succeeded very indifferently, and Tots was clinging to her with such a frantic grasp,

that she was sadly hindering their upward progress.

"Oh, Tots," she implored, in a voice faint from exhaustion and suppressed terror, while pointing to a "hissock" of heath. "Pray don't drag on me so heavily, climb to that tuft of heather, just while I get a little rest!"

"I shall fall!" gasped Tots, finding her voice suddenly, and giving a loud scream as her foot slipped, but instead of catching at the heather she only clutched her sister more tightly.

Their situation was now really dangerous. They seemed to have arrived at such a point that they could neither climb higher, nor go back. An attempt to retrace their steps would indeed have been madness, and a false step would have precipitated them both to the beach, now two or three hundred feet below them.

"Bessie, we shall be killed!" screamed Tots, beside herself with terror, and scream after scream rose into the air, and echoed among the hoary cliffs.

Bessie, wrought up to an agony which resulted in a sort of deadly calmness, turned up to the blue sky a face as white as marble,

and as her sister's screams rang in her ears, she shudderingly closed her eyes.

"Oh, Bessie, save me!" reiterated Tots, and indeed it seemed as though her desperate clutch were relaxing.

For one moment the instinct of self-preservation, so powerful in the human breast, prompted Bessie to shake from her the terrible weight which seemed dragging her down to death; the next, she had disengaged one hand from the friendly heather, and cast a supporting arm round her now almost fainting sister, whose relaxing hold showed that her powers were forsaking her.

This state of things could not have lasted another five minutes. Bessie's exhausted muscles must have given way, and the two sisters have been hurled down to the beach below, but fortunately aid was near.

"Hold on! You shall have help immediately," a man's voice cried; and the sounds quickened all the pulses in Bessie's frame, and encouraged her for a little further effort. She could speak no word in answer, nor even look up to see from whom the voice came, but she clung to the heather with renewed strength. Another moment passed, and yet another,—what hours seemed to drag by!

The voice came nearer. "Keep up; I am coming!" it said. Bessie's strength was fast ebbing. Horror! their precarious footing began to slide from beneath them; the heather, to which she clung with the energy of despair began to loosen—she was slipping—going down—down—when a man's strong arm was round them both, and a man's voice in her ear exclaimed,—

"Safe now, thank God! we shall have you up at the top in one minute!"

Not a moment too soon. Scarcely had they been lifted to a more secure standing-place, when the jutting mound, whereon the girls' feet had rested, crumbled away, and carrying an avalanche of loose soil along with it, rushed in fragments to the rocks below.

CHAPTER X

SAUNDERS ONSLOW stood at the window of his sitting-room on the afternoon chosen by our party for their first boating excursion.

He had an opera-glass in his hand, and was beguiling the tedious time by making observations on all who came within his range of vision. Barnes lay at his length on the hard horse-hair sofa, which being of lodging-house dimensions (that is to say, so narrow and short as to insure excruciating discomfort), had been pieced out with chairs in order to accommodate his unusual length of limb. It was one of Barnes's days of pain, and with aching back and closed eyes, he had been lying down for the greater part of the morning. Such days were frequent with him, poor fellow, and sometimes he suffered greatly; yet never had any one heard an impatient or complaining word from his lips, and the fortitude with which he endured pain

secured him the tender respect and attention of all who had anything to do with him. To be sure he had been accustomed from childhood to weak health, but the patience and cheerfulness which were such marked traits in his matured character had been entirely foreign to his temperament at an earlier age. He had been a difficult child to manage, having been peevish and exacting, and sometimes subject to bursts of passion which often resulted in physical prostration ; moody at other times and less disposed to display gratitude for care and attention than a captious and fault-finding spirit. It was hoped that as he grew up and his constitution strengthened, these faults of temper would disappear with the delicacy that called them forth. But as he approached manhood there were no symptoms of improving health. On the contrary he seemed a prey to some inherent weakness, which threatened to preclude him from entering upon any career of manly usefulness. But a striking alteration took place gradually in his character, and it seemed as if his temper, purified by suffering, was becoming perfected by slow degrees, for he grew at last as remarkable for patience and uncomplaining cheerful endurance, as he

had formerly been for the opposites of those qualities.

On the afternoon in question, while Saunders stood at the window with his opera-glass, Barnes lay silently with his eyes closed.

"There go our next door neighbours," remarked Saunders, putting down his glass, as Basil and the girls ran down the steps of No. 2, on their way to the boat. "They seem in a monstrous hurry! they might have turned to look at a fellow!"

He watched them as they walked briskly along the beach, then, as they pursued the way over the sands towards the water's edge, he applied his glass once more to his eyes, appearing to find some marvellous attraction in their movements.

"They are going out for a row with that long-legged fellow Hyde," he remarked. "I can't think how such a pretty girl could take up with such a dull clod!"

From this remark it would seem that Saunders was not disposed to do more justice to the charms of Basil Hyde, than the latter had meted out to him, when he put him down as "an intolerable puppy."

"Poor girl," added Saunders, in a tone of tender compassion. "She is too good

to throw herself away on a fellow like him !”

Indeed, Saunders had so great an opinion of the beauty and sprightliness of the second Miss Bowsted that he considered her almost worthy of his own condescending affection, and that such a destiny would be more what she deserved.

“ Stupid fellow—that Hyde,” continued he : keeping up a running commentary for his own amusement and the edification of his brother ; “ a regular land-lubber ! No more notion of managing a boat than you have, Barney ! Upon my word, I wonder that the talent and enterprise of Ravensbay have not yet invented a more convenient way of getting into the boats. They are all standing—a disconsolate row—on one of those crazy forms ; I shouldn’t be a bit surprised to see the whole concern give way. By Jove !” he added, after a moment of intent observation, “ What a collapse ! The bench has doubled up in the middle, and there are two of them floundering in the water !” And Saunders, apparently much tickled at the disaster, began laughing heartily.

“ In the water !” echoed Barnes, raising himself with a look of anxious inquiry.

"Yes," said his brother, still laughing ;
"Ah ! I thought that would rouse you up a bit, Barney, my boy ! The fascinating Bessie has come in for a most undignified sousing."

Barnes got up, and walked to the window. Taking the glass out of his brother's hand, he levelled it in the direction Saunders indicated, but by this time the whole party were safe in the boat, and Basil was addressing himself to the oars.

"All right now, old fellow !" said Saunders ; "you need not have left your sofa after all. There were no bones broken, I dare say !"

Barnes returned the glass with a sigh, but the very mention of Bessie seemed to have induced some degree of energy, for he lay down no more that afternoon. He took up a book, and leaning his elbows on the table, and supporting his head on his hands, he appeared to be diligently engaged in its perusal ; but in reality his thoughts were far otherwise occupied.

Saunders, after a few abortive attempts to follow the motions of the boating party, at length laid down his glass, and declared he would just step down to "Dolly's" and procure some tobacco. Nodding a gay farewell

to the contemplative Barnes, and leaving him with an injunction to take good care of himself, the exquisite Saunders lounged away. But as soon as he had fairly departed a restless spirit appeared also to have taken possession of Barnes, for he raised himself, pushed away his book, and took to pacing the room with long irregular strides. Then it occurred to him that he had not been out that day, and that a walk might be of service in calming his agitated feelings. The sweetness and beauty of the afternoon tempted him to go further than he had at first intended, and having gone out of doors he could not make up his mind to return to the house. As he walked his languor gave place to a sort of excitement, lending him temporary strength, as if to prepare him for some sudden emergency. No presentiment of the kind, however, occurred to his mind, and his thoughts, though projected into the future, were far from presenting himself as the hero of any adventure. He turned up the wooded glen leading from the shore by a gradual and winding ascent to the high road which he pursued unconsciously for a mile or more without experiencing any sense of fatigue. At length he paused at a spot

where the road forked, and after a moment's hesitation he took the left-hand turning, and found himself on a road running parallel with the cliffs, where the scenery was as new to him as it was beautiful.

His walks hitherto had been confined to the neighbourhood of the shore, so that he was ignorant of much of the lovely landscape. Now, as he turned off from the main road, he commanded a magnificent view. To his left lay the blue water, here and there flecked by sailing-vessels, looking from that height like white-winged sea-birds. The bold half-circle described by the bay was broken in one place by a long low headland, round whose rocky girdle the wavelets broke softly, and in whose shadow slept a tiny cove, whose waters, clear as glass, mirrored with life-like distinctness a small stone jetty with a miniature sailing-boat anchored alongside. Beyond the low-lying promontory rose perpendicularly a rugged cliff, clothed up to its summit with gently-sloping corn-fields on the land side, but presenting a stern sea-front of slaty rock, against which the restless waters fretted eternally and broke themselves into foam. This was the beginning of the inhospitable-

looking boundary which walled in the whole southern sweep of the bay. The beautiful combination of hoary rock and dancing water filled Barnes with delight, but when he turned his gaze on the other hand he paused and drew a long breath of admiration. What a sudden transition from coast scenery to the exquisite richness of pastoral beauty ! He rested his folded arms on the top of a gate and allowed his eyes to feast on a wealth of loveliness.

A fertile valley, scooped, as it were, out of the surrounding high ground, lay before him. The afternoon sunshine illuminated the landscape with such a glory that the valley literally seemed to laugh and sing, and the rich colouring of the waving corn-fields melted into the soft green of the higher ground, which rose on all sides with an undulating sweep, encircling the valley as with tenderly protecting arms. Beyond all, occupying a central position in the background of the picture, a solitary mountain reared itself, pyramidal, abrupt, and supplying with its majestic outline the one element of grandeur needed to perfect the landscape. Barnes, like all who are delicately organized, was very susceptible to the influences of natural beauty, and keenly

alive to the delight, almost akin to sadness, which it inspires. Absorbed in contemplation he stood long, leaning over the gate, too much enchained even to sigh, utterly dumb with the pleasure of simply gazing on what was so lovely. It did not enter his mind to retrace his steps, some undefined impulse still urged him forward, and when his eye caught sight of an unfrequented path leading off from the road to the edge of the cliff, he took it instantly. Tired at last, he threw himself down among the tall ferns and tangled grass. The dreamy influence of the still summer afternoon so prevailed over him that he fell asleep; but his slumbers were disturbed by undefined but terrible images. He beheld a white face looking up at him from a dark abyss, and imploring arms stretched upwards, as if entreating aid. The face seemed familiar; it grew upon him, and finally it took the likeness of Bessie. She was falling! She was crying to him to help her—she shrieked—and then Barnes awoke suddenly. The shriek he had heard in his dream still rang in his ears; then another and another rose upon the still air. He sprang to his feet, and in another moment stood looking down the precipitous descent. Oh, horror! Two girls were clinging to the

tufts of grass and heather many feet below him; a white face was upturned to his, and beseeching eyes filled with dumb entreaty. It was the face he had seen in his dream—Bessie's face. Not from her, however, but from Tots the shrieks had come, and again her despairing cries rent the air, while Bessie, silent and death-like, seemed more eloquent than Tots in her noisy fear. Yet her cries had summoned aid more effectual than Barnes's unassisted efforts could have proved. Two men, who had been working in a neighbouring field, came running to the spot armed with a coil of rope, which they had considerably brought, for they had concluded from the sounds that some one was over the edge. To this rope, indeed, the girls probably owed their safety, since Barnes's unaided strength would have been insufficient. It was he, however, who, supported by the rope which was held by the two men above, ventured over the edge, and with an exertion of strength which would have appeared surprising in a stronger man, and which, in Barnes's case, could only be accounted for by the intense excitement which strung up all his muscles for the moment, he half carried, half led, first one and then the other to the firm, level ground

above. Half dazed from the intense agony she had just passed through, and hardly able to believe in the reality of their rescue, Bessie looked round with slowly returning consciousness. Yes, they were safe; there was Tots, almost herself again, talking and laughing by turns, and eagerly pressing a reward upon the two men, who stoutly refused it.

But whose was the arm which had borne her into safety; whose the voice whose accents, falling encouragingly upon her ear, had nerved her to support yet a few moments longer the fearful strain which, once relaxed, would have resulted in instant death both to her and her sister?

She turned to search for her deliverer, and her eyes rested on the countenance of Barnes, flushed from his exertions, and every feature radiant with thankfulness and joy.

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW era from this memorable day began for Barnes Onslow. He found himself received the same evening into the bosom of the Doctor's family, the centre of interest, while Tots, with surprising volubility, detailed the adventure of the afternoon. Nor was Bessie backward in adding her testimony, though her narrative of the event was by no means such a lengthy one as her sister's

Poor Barnes! To one so shy the situation was replete with embarrassment, though these people did not overload him with voluble thanks, for it seemed as if their joyful emotion was too much to find vent in many words.

The next day, however, poor Barnes was very unwell, and, prostrated by all he had gone through, he lay on the sofa almost without power to speak. Saunders had not now, as formerly, to nurse his brother unaided, for Aunt Patty took upon herself to assist him,

and it was her hand and voice that soothed the invalid. But towards evening Barnes grew greatly better and able to sit up, and after partaking of some little delicacy, expressly prepared for him by Aunt Patty, he appeared so much revived that she was able to leave him with a mind at rest, and to give a good account of his condition to all the inquirers at No. 2. Aunt Patty's vacant chair beside the invalid was soon occupied by Saunders, who was delighted to see such an improvement in his patient.

"Ah! you were in luck's way, old fellow!" he observed as the conversation turned upon yesterday's adventure. "Here you are, suddenly transformed into a hero in the eyes of our fair friends next door; it was worth while going through an adventure to get such a fuss made about you afterwards, eh, Barney?"

But let it not be thought from these remarks that Saunders experienced any, even the faintest, pang of jealousy at seeing his brother thus made much of; envious feelings were altogether foreign to his easy disposition, and indeed he was always ready to rejoice in whatever good fortune fell to Barnes's share.

Henceforth the latter was the privileged guest and intimate friend of that family into

whose circle he had long sighed to enter on a familiar footing. He and Saunders were heartily bidden welcome whenever they chose to present themselves; and thenceforth no arrangement was made in which they were not included, so that the inmates of No. 2 and No. 3 might now be considered as one party. But alas! into that party, apparently so united, the elements of fatal division had already entered. The circle seemed to have split up into knots of twos and threes; nay, the spirit of unsociability seemed to possess Basil to such an extent that he would frequently be absent whole mornings, and give no account of himself to Tots, who would be sometimes tearful, sometimes aggravated to sullenness by his truant conduct. To Bessie his manner grew so distant that she was led to fear she had unwittingly offended him, and yet, when she anxiously reviewed her conduct, she could not recollect having done anything to estrange him. Some cause, however, there must be, since such a short time ago he had seemed almost to enjoy her society. She could do nothing, she felt, she must be content to take no notice. Doubtless all would come right in time, but even if from that day forth he were to continue to treat her with

the same coldness, what difference could it make to her? Their paths in life would hereafter be wide apart; what if, for a few days—a few weeks at farthest, she had to endure his aversion or indifference? She was a good deal puzzled, however, when she perceived how frequently he absented himself from his betrothed. He would spend a whole morning rowing about by himself; and when he appeared at dinner, bronzed by exposure, glowing with healthy exercise, he would observe, by way of excuse, when taken to task, that they none of them cared to go on the water, so he had thought it not worth while to ask them.

“But,” pouted Tots one day, “we enjoy sitting on the shore and listening while you read, and you never do that now.”

“What!” Basil exclaimed in pretended indignation, “waste this glorious weather, and this splendid opportunity of increasing health and strength by proper exercise, in sprawling idly on the beach while you fiddle-faddle with some woman’s work!”

“I should think you are man enough without everlasting rowing and bathing!” replied his beloved, not by any means soothed by Basil’s way of viewing matters. And truly

as the young man drew himself up, and stretched out his arms to show how the muscles had expanded by the exercises in question, he looked a lover of whom any girl might well be proud.

Tots was proud of his handsome personal appearance, but cherished a secret feeling of dissatisfaction, inasmuch as he was by no means the sort of lover she had pictured for herself, that is to say, one who could never be happy away from her; one who should look upon it as his highest privilege to be allowed to be always at her side, to do a thousand and one things to show his devotion; in fact, one who should be content to lie at her feet, and bask in the light of her smiles. Such had been the man she had dreamed about.

But somehow Basil Hyde seemed the very reverse of this. Why, he even preferred what he called his manly exercises to her perpetual society. It never occurred to him to carry her cloak, or hold up her umbrella, unless she asked him to do so. Then, indeed, he would most courteously render her these little attentions, for she could not but allow that he was every inch a gentleman.

She stood, to a certain extent, in awe of him too. It was not always that she ven-

tured to let him see how cross and angry she really felt; and his look of cold and somewhat disdainful astonishment when she ventured on a sulky display before him, was sufficient to make her feel very much ashamed and uncomfortable. Somehow she felt that she seldom was at her best with him, or else she was dimly conscious that her best fell short of what he required. On the whole she was disappointed. It was too bad of him to make her feel so inferior; she was convinced he did it only to show off his own superiority, real or fancied.

But, to do Basil justice, he would have reproached himself severely had he known Tots's thoughts concerning him; and he had no idea that she felt injured because he cared not to be for ever at her side. He thought that girls liked sometimes to be left undisturbed to their own pursuits as men did. He would not willingly have caused Tots the smallest feeling of disappointment, for his nature was too chivalrous to permit him knowingly to pain the woman who had plighted her faith to him. And yet latterly, and especially since the adventure on the cliff, he had become too surely conscious that his heart was not wholly given to this one, and

that his affections pointed in sad earnest towards her who had been their first object.

How far was each one of that apparently happy party from divining the secret care of any other one! In daily contact, in almost hourly intercourse, the innermost life of each was a sealed book to all the rest.

CHAPTER XII.

“WHAT shallow creatures men are! There is no accounting for their fickleness!”

It was Tots who, with such sweeping severity, thus characterized the sterner sex. It might be supposed that some defection on the part of her lover had excited this burst of righteous indignation. But not so. The words were suggested by the sight of Saunders Onslow, who passed her one morning on the shore, talking gaily to a very pretty girl, who appeared to engross his entire attention.

He bowed to Tots, just as if she had been some merely ordinary acquaintance, and did not even interrupt the flow of his remarks to his fair companion. Tots felt herself expand in righteous anger at this flagrant instance of man's changeableness. Could this be Saunders, who for months past had been her devoted slave? And such a girl too! Tots could not altogether deny that she was pretty,

but it was "quite a namby-pamby prettiness." She looked as if she had "nothing in her." She (Tots) could not think what Saunders "saw to admire in such an uninteresting-looking creature." Tots bent her steps towards the house in anything but a placidly happy state of mind; nor did she recover the shock of her former cavalier's defection for the rest of the day, nor even for two or three days after, for now there was positively no one with whom she could keep up a harmless flirtation to while the time away, and time began to hang heavy on her hands.

Certainly this misguided young woman, being engaged to be married, ought never to have troubled herself further about the doings of any other but her own particular young man. But Tots did not consider one lover enough—even though she was irrevocably engaged to that one—especially when he was so lofty and indifferent that he would not even squabble with her, by way of variety. Tots thought it very hard indeed to be reduced to one admirer, particularly after he had fallen into the comparatively tame position of being engaged to her.

And now she was growing profoundly bored. She fancied she had exhausted all the

delights of the sea-side. She had liked it very well at first by way of novelty, but now that the novelty had worn off it palled upon her. Unfortunately she had few resources within herself, and so depended entirely for amusement upon outside influences.

Poor Tots! She thought that everything was very hard upon her, and that she was a very ill-used being indeed. She quite forgot that, all the while she was complaining of Basil's neglect, she was never taking the slightest trouble to meet his wishes in any way.

Basil meanwhile had his own sources of disquiet. It became more and more apparent to him that between himself and his betrothed but little sympathy existed, either in dispositions or pursuits. He had tried to interest her in what he liked himself, but of late he had given up the attempt, finding that he could not rouse any corresponding enthusiasm on kindred subjects. He was very fond of reading aloud, and could recite from memory whole cantos from his favourite poets with exceeding satisfaction to himself and some others. Of these latter, however, Tots was not one. She liked well enough to sit idly on the shore, and listen to

reading aloud, but then the sort of books she cared for were just those that Basil took no sort of pleasure in. An exciting novel was what she enjoyed, but her lover characterized all such literature as trash. Occasionally indeed he had been known to make use of a more graphic, if less elegant term, for his own tastes lay in a very different direction.

It had been a great disappointment to him to find, as he soon did, that the intelligence of his beloved was not equal to her personal beauty. It is trying to a man, in looking forward to the future, to have to reflect that the woman who is to be his companion for life is more or less indifferent to all the subjects he most delights in, especially when she also evinces no desire even to try and get up an interest in them, were it only to please her future lord and master. This was one of Basil's grievances against foolish, wilful Tots, and it was carefully noted down and pondered over by observant Sophy; who, while apparently engrossed with sketching, was in truth keenly alive to every little incident concerning this pair. Much would she wonder, in her sage and unsophisticated mind, how these two, who could not be half-an-hour in each other's company without awakening mutual

irritation and disappointment, would be able to support the daily intimacy of married life, wherein there could be no escape for either from the uncongenial society of the other. Once or twice she even went so far as to say to herself, "I wonder what they go philandering on for? I do believe they only bore one another."

Another sentiment had taken root in Basil's mind, which made him uneasy and dissatisfied. This was an intense aversion to Barnes Onslow, and an insurmountable repugnance to seeing him on such intimate terms with his own circle. Uncle Rob evinced on all occasions a most tender regard for Barnes, and would even go the length of asking for his company on those "naturalizing" excursions which he had hitherto loved to pursue in solitude. So Barnes and the uncle would frequently potter about together, bringing home baskets full of "infusoria," and other horrors of a slimy nature; while Aunt Patty would tenderly look after the favoured lad, taking as much care of him as if he were a son. But for none of these reasons did Basil find himself irritated against Barnes, but because it became evident that the presumptuous youth entertained tender

sentiments towards Bessie. Basil would have found it hard to render a good reason why this man should not love Bessie, always supposing she herself were a consenting party. Surely he who had risked his life to save hers had a right to aspire to her hand, if any man could plead such a right? But here was the very thing that roused Basil's indignation. Barnes, he thought, was meanly trying to establish a claim on Bessie's affections, because a fortunate accident had put him in a position to render her a service. He might even go so far as to prevail upon Bessie to accept him out of gratitude, for he (Basil) felt sure that this girl would never incline her affections towards such a one as Barnes. Yet he could not have proved that Barnes was in any way unworthy of Bessie, or have shown cause why he should be considered objectionable. He would always conclude the matter by mentally declaring that Barnes Onslow should not have Bessie; the fellow was presumptuous even to think of it!

Poor Barnes! Anything like presumption was the diametrically opposite of his retiring and diffident nature. So far from obtrusive had been his attentions, that even Bessie herself had no idea that any-

thing more than mere friendliness was intended by them.

Women have the credit of being very quick to discover when a man loves them, however carefully he may disguise his sentiments. But the reason of Bessie's reprehensible dullness in this particular instance was probably to be sought for in the fact that her heart and imagination had been pre-occupied. Basil perceived that she had no suspicion of Barnes's feelings, but he feared lest she should soon be made aware of them, and then he dreaded that an overstrained sense of gratitude might induce her to accept him. Well, even if it were so, why should he concern himself about it? Truly Bessie's future was no business of his. Still he would say to himself, "Barnes Onslow shall not have her! She is a thousand times too good for him."

Tots burst abruptly upon his meditations one day, when his thoughts were occupied in some such manner.

"Basil!" she cried, "the very person I was looking for! We want you; do come!"

"What for?" he asked carelessly; but turning towards her as he spoke, and meeting her shining eyes and smiling face, his manner

insensibly softened, and his heart went out towards her with something of revived affection, as he marked how winning and beautiful she was.

Tots really was pretty enough to turn any man's head; but it becomes awkward for a man, after he has engaged himself, to discover that his heart has not altogether participated in the weakness of his head.

"What is it, Tots?" he inquired gently, as he encountered her pleading eyes: "I am at your service to any reasonable extent."

"Ah! there you go!" cried she laughingly; "with your usual talk about reason and intelligence, and all the rest of it, which you know always bores me so! But at all events you cannot object to our present project; it is merely to sit on the shore, with our work, and you shall read aloud to us!"

"Who does 'us' include?" inquired Basil, anxious to know if the pronoun included one whom he knew would be an appreciative listener.

"Sophy and this child!" said Tots, touching herself with a graceful gesture; "is not that audience enough?"

"Well, and what is the book to be?" he inquired again, catching sight of a sus-

picious-looking volume with the unmistakable air of the circulating library upon it.

"Oh!" said Tots, "a very nice book; now pray don't turn up your nose at it, it is a capital story. They have the most heart-rending sorrows, and all get into a delicious tangle, and then Lady Isabella falls off a ladder, and *He* picks up the pieces!"

Basil had much ado to prevent his features from describing that interesting process which Tots called turning up his nose. But he took the book from her, resolved magnanimously to be patient, and to read it aloud, if it were really readable. He turned over a few pages, and delivered his opinion in an undertone, comprised in the laconic but expressive monosyllable, "Rot!"

"What did you say?" inquired Tots, innocently, not even suspecting the nature of his remark.

"I said, Very well, dear," he replied, with a most reprehensible disregard of truth.

"How nice!" said Tots gaily; "come then, let us join Sophy! She is waiting on the shore."

The two walked amicably towards the young woman in question, who looked up at their approach, and was delighted, not to say

surprised to see them apparently so happy in each other's company.

"Caricaturing, as usual, Sophy," Basil observed, as he took up a luxurious position between the girls, first carefully spreading out their superfluous drapery to make a comfortable couch. "It is a bad habit, my child." This in a tenderly reproving tone, as if of a benevolent elder brother. Sophy, somewhat nettled by his assumption of such airs towards her, sketched more diligently than before, and Basil supported himself against Tots, while his appreciative eye took in every detail of the lovely view before him. The sea was by no means in a dead calm, which would have been an aspect too tame to please him; there were great white rollers, churned up by the north-east wind, which had run riot the night before, and which even yet lingered in fitful gusts, as if reluctant to depart. Far away towards the horizon, the deep blue was broken at rapid intervals by the foaming crests of the waves, and away to the right hand, they rushed impetuously against their rocky boundary, sending up showers of spray into the air. The sight fired Basil's imagination, and made him forget all about the hair-breadth adventures

of Lady Isabella. "Ah!" he exclaimed, his eye fixed on a wreath of foam surrounding a solitary rock, which—now hidden from view, now as suddenly emerging—seemed almost like some desperate creature struggling for life. "Can you not in fancy go back to the grand old heathen days, and picture to yourself a fleet of the glorious old Northmen speeding hitherwards—the sun glowing on their rude shields and spears, the breeze bearing high above the din of the billows, their wild war-songs, and their inspiring martial music! Imagine these Vikings with hearts that defy the dangers of sea and land alike, and spirits as free as the wind that fills their sails—sweeping along with souls bent on conquest; their king Harold the Fair-haired, the first Norseman that ever reigned over this isle, being the foremost to leap on the newly-discovered strand, and plant upon it their all-conquering banner! Fancy, as the standard of the Raven flung out its folds to the wind, how their war-shout would echo, grand as a roll of thunder, among those rocky chasms! It might have been on this very bay, that the old King Balder, celebrated in Mackay's stirring lines, committed himself and his flaming

vessel to the blue waters ; determined that the scene of his triumphs when living should be his tomb when dead."

And he began enthusiastically to recite,—

"My strength is failing fast,
Said the Sea King to his men ;
I shall never sail the seas
Like a conqueror again.
But while yet a drop remains
Of the life-blood in my veins,
Raise, O raise me from the bed,—
Put the crown upon my head ;
Put my good sword in my hand,
And so lead me to the strand
Where my ship at anchor rides

Steadily.

If I cannot end my life
In the bloody battle strife,
Let me die, as I have lived

On the sea."

"See, Basil—" observed Sophy, nudging his elbow, as with right hand outstretched he aided the affect by appropriate gesticulation,—"isn't this like you ?" And the inspired youth, interrupted just as his excited feelings had wound themselves up to a climax, be-

held himself ridiculously caricatured on Sophy's glowing page.

She had represented him as he appeared baling the water out of the boat on that memorable afternoon of their first and last rowing excursion. On his knees, surrounded by a pool of water, his hair dishevelled and his garments characterized by indifference as to fit, he was depicted, gazing with an expression of the utmost dismay; his mouth drooping at the corners to an extent which must have caused physical inconvenience, and his eyes,—those eyes which, he flattered himself, were at the least expressive and pleasing,—seemed suddenly inspired with an ardent anxiety to jump out of his head.

“Ye gods, grant me patience!” exclaimed the unfortunate victim of Sophy's too quiz-zical pencil. “Really you girls are enough to drive a man crazy!” and he sprang to his feet, with something like real indignation.

But his face assumed no distant resemblance to the expression wherewith Sophy had endowed her sketch, when he perceived that, to crown the aggravation, Tots had the book containing the fictitious woes of Lady Isabella open in her lap, which she had evidently been

reading to herself all the while. How she had got hold of it, was a mystery past the wit of Basil to solve. She must have abstracted it from his coat pocket, while, wrapt in his subject, he had been reciting for their benefit. Just as he fancied he had contrived to arouse their interest by his eloquence to find that the thoughts of both of them had been so differently occupied really was enough to exasperate the most placid of men, and Basil was by no means a placid man. With a gesture of impatience he turned his back on them, and strode away majestically, unconscious that he was carrying off Tots's veil, which had hooked itself on to the button of his coat behind, and which was flinging out its graceful folds to the breeze, as the orator had described the unfurling of the Norseman's banner.

The two girls fell straightway into convulsions of laughter, while Sophy set to work to take his likeness in this novel and interesting aspect; and Basil, unsuspecting of the liberties which were being taken with his personal appearance, stalked towards the house muttering wrathfully something dreadfully scathing anent the "frivolity of women."

"Ah! if Bessie had been there, his elo-

quence would not have been thrown away. She at least would have accorded him an intelligent attention. She could have entered into his enthusiasm, for had he not discovered long ago that she was a kindred spirit? Ah! what a fool he had been." Well, perhaps he had. But Bessie had been seized with an unsociable fit that morning, and had not been seen by anybody since breakfast. She had received a letter from Brand, stating his intention of joining them at the sea-side on the following week, with other news concerning him and his affairs which made her desire to be alone and think. Shortly after breakfast, with letter in pocket and mind pre-occupied, she had started to spend a meditative hour among the rocks. The tide was out, and she was able to ramble for a long distance along the firm sands. The morning sunshine danced on the crisp foam, the boisterous breeze eddied about her, filling her with a sense of exhilaration such as she had been used to feel in her former strolls over the moors, and she began to recognize herself as the Bessie of old, who had been ready to dance and sing as she bounded over the purple heather, in the dear past days, when as yet trouble had not come nigh her. When

leaving the house she had merely intended to find some little retreat not far from home where she might sit and ponder, and read Brand's letter at her leisure. But "a spirit in her feet"—as Brand's favourite Shelley hath it—led her along unconsciously, while the delicious shining sands stretching away into the distance invited her yet further. At length an unaccountable desire took possession of her to view once more the memorable cove where she and Tots had come so near cutting the knot of all perplexities. Many a time she had dreamed of the spot since that adventure, but she had not again beheld it with waking eyes, so she determined to visit it once more. The tide being so far down, it could be reached without the slightest risk, and she might keep to the sands all the way. It looked different, somehow, when she once more stood upon the shelving beach and gazed about her. It looked less solitary and dreadful in reality, than it had done in dreams. Perhaps it was the absence of the water lapping softly on the shingle that she missed from the view. Strange what a difference the low tide made. When she and Tots had landed there, to meet their unexpected adventure, the rising water had cut off all com-

munication between it and the shore on either hand, so no wonder that it then appeared wild and solitary. But now, on this sunny morning, and with the sea so far off that the sound of its waves came in soothing cadences lulling her into a dreamy repose, this cove seemed to lose half the terrors wherewith her sleeping memory had invested it.

She lay down luxuriously on the sloping shingle, and read her letter, and pictured to herself the pleasure of seeing Brand again. She would have to possess her soul in patience for yet a few days, for he was not to arrive till Monday week, and this was only Saturday. But how quickly would a week pass, with the prospect of his coming to lend it wings. What walks they would have together, what talks; she would lead him to this very cove, and relate the adventure on the very spot where it took place, saying, "There it was that we first ventured to look down, and were so terrified when we saw the frightful depth below, and there Barnes—noble, gallant, fellow!—came to us, as we clung for our lives to the heather."

Gradually Bessie's thoughts drifted further back, and placed her once more in fancy in the old Yorkshire home, calling up vividly

the image of her father, as he had been wont to sit among them at the merry fire-side. Surely it could not be that only eight months had passed since his death,—since the terrible journey which was to have such a bitter ending? Yes, only eight months; and the events of years seemed to have been crowded into that short space. How the current of their lives had altered its course since then! What an amount of suffering had been concentrated into a few months—to herself at least, while an equal amount of happiness had fallen to the lot of her sister. Yet somehow Tots did not seem to live in such an atmosphere of bliss as her circumstances would seem to warrant.

How strange it is that people seem sometimes to undervalue matters which others would consider blessings!

Bessie was angry with herself for allowing her thoughts thus to drift into the old channel. She had determined never to dwell upon this theme, but to forcibly turn her thoughts into another direction whenever they threatened to approach the forbidden subject. Yet, here she was, weakly yielding to the old impulse. She was about to turn homewards, in order to divert her mind, when her soli-

tude was abruptly invaded by no less a person than Barnes Onslow, who suddenly appeared round the wall of rock which had hitherto shut Bessie out of sight, so that he was as much surprised as herself at their unexpected meeting.

After her first feeling of annoyance at being disturbed had passed away, Bessie welcomed him, for would not his companionship serve at least to banish from her mind all that she ought not to dwell upon?

He appeared inclined to turn back, as if fearful of intruding; but of a sudden he changed his mind, and advanced resolutely, as though he had determined to join Bessie whether she would or not.

However, she invited him to share her picturesque retirement, and he stretched himself on the beach beside her in such a manner that he could command a full view of her face. Possibly he too recognized this cove, as the spot where he had earned such an enviable reputation, but if it were so he made no allusion to it. Contrary to his usual practice, having something to say, he began at once to say it.

"I have long wished to ask your advice concerning a friend of mine," he said.

"May I hope that you will listen to me now?"

"Certainly," Bessie replied cheerfully; "if it be a subject wherein my advice can be of any use, you shall have it with all my heart."

"Of use," he repeated; "yes, indeed, you are most qualified to advise."

Bessie felt some curiosity to know what it might all be about, for she was at a loss even to guess in what respect any advice of hers could edify Barnes; and he, after a little pause, proceeded to enlighten her, glancing at her every now and then, as if to read her thoughts in her face.

"I have a friend," he began, "who has asked me to advise him how to act under certain circumstances. I don't know how to advise him, in truth; but when you know what the circumstances are, you will be able to tell me what to say to him. He has laboured under the disadvantage of delicate health from his youth, and he feels it a terrible drawback in an infinite number of ways."

Barnes paused for a moment and sighed heavily.

"Yes?" said Bessie softly, feeling that

poor Barnes himself had tasted of these drawbacks, and could therefore speak feelingly about them.

“He has never known what it is to enjoy health and strength, and moreover his delicacy has cut him off from all the ordinary paths of manly usefulness, and placed all the prizes of ambition and industry beyond his reach. He can never strive with others of his own standing, but is condemned to remain an idle and inglorious spectator.”

His voice grew so sad that a fear crossed Bessie's mind lest he too keenly sympathized in the sorrows of his friend, and she said gently, “Let him not feel downcast, even if the excitements of an active life do not fall to his share. There have been noble deeds done and intellectual work accomplished, by many who have been often obliged to act the part of spectators, while others entered the lists, and fought the battle. Witness blind Homer, whose songs have stirred the hearts of succeeding ages; think of crippled Tyr-tæus, the Athenian bard, whose lays excited the Spartans to go forth to the war which he could take no part in himself. And in our own times the author, Frank Smedley, who, though all his life crippled by illness, wrote

such spirited books as have been the delight of innumerable readers. He, you see, has left his mark, and earned the grateful recollection of posterity."

"But I—I mean my friend cannot write books," said Barnes.

"But you can save the lives of perishing human beings," said Bessie, growing excited as the whole scene rose vividly before her; "and I have no doubt your friend will find some work, some noble, or at least useful employment which he has powers to accomplish."

Barnes looked at her for a moment, and his face lighted up as he spoke. "Perhaps you are right," he said. "You must be right. I will tell him what you say. But let me make you acquainted with his difficulty. A short time ago he made the acquaintance of one, upon whose—whose kind regard he feels that the happiness of his life depends. She as yet knows nothing of his sentiments, and he hesitates to disclose them, because being such as he is, weak in health, useless to his fellow-men, with no prospect of ever emerging from the obscurity to which his feeble constitution condemns him,—in fact," continued Barnes, his eyes

fixed on her face with an expression of earnest and eloquent pleading, his voice trembling with an emotion which threatened to master him,—“in fact, being very much such a one as myself, he knows not whether he has any right to ask a woman to bind herself to him for life, and consent to share such a home as he could make for her. Tell me,” he continued, his words coming fast and thick; “what do you think? Would it be presumptuous in him to hope? Might he believe that he would not be acting basely and selfishly, seeking his own happiness more than that of the woman he loves? O tell me, do you think there would be any room for him to hope for a favourable response, if he were to stake his all on the issue of her answer?”

His accents, tremulous with his intense pleading, ceased, and he paused for her to speak. Her head was turned away, and her hands played nervously with the letter in her lap. She did not speak for a minute, and it seemed as if she were striving to command her voice. Then she said, in a tone so low that no ear but a lover's could have caught the words, “She would be base indeed who could accuse such generous love of being

selfish. If she be a true woman she ought to feel proud to have won the affections of such a man as I am sure your friend must be. But—but—" she made a gesture to him to be silent, as he was eagerly about to say something, "But it may happen—such things do happen sometimes—it may be, I say, that her heart is no longer in her own keeping, that she has nothing to bestow in return for his unselfish devotion. Advise your friend to do nothing rashly. Let him assure himself first that no such objection as I have mentioned exists. Let him not expose himself and her to the pain of rejection."

She had risen as she spoke, and now stood in the shadow of the cliff to whose rugged side she had, but a few days before, clung in peril of her life.

Barnes rose also, and stood before her, very white, very quiet.

"Must I then tell him that he may not even hope?" he said.

She raised her eyes, full of untold sorrow, to his face, and for a moment their gaze met.

All disguise was at an end between them. Each was conscious of being fully understood by the other, but for a few moments Bessie

was a prey to a bitter struggle. Ought she not to make this man happy, even if in so doing she failed to secure her own happiness? If the fragments of a heart would satisfy him, ought she not to say to him, "Such love as I have left shall be yours; it is the least I can do, after what you have done for me." Might she not, in devoting herself to him, find a balm for her own sorrow, and at least save him from a life-long grief? Here, on the very spot where he had saved her life, dare she refuse what he asked of her? She glanced up at the memorable precipice; once more she looked at his white, anxious face, and her resolution was nearly taken to lay aside her private feelings, and tell him she would do as he wished. But again, how could she act so base a part while (alas! too surely) her heart was given elsewhere? Nothing could make this right, no,—no, her course was clear. And at whatever cost of present suffering to Barnes, it would, it must be, best for him in the end. The struggle had been so severe that the unconscious tears rolled down Bessie's face; but so instantaneous had been the mental process, that it seemed not a moment after Barnes had put the final question, "Can there be no hope?" ere her

answer came, tremulous, but decided, "No, none!"

"Dear me, this is very curious! An *Aphrodite aculeata*, I declare, and a noble specimen too, fully eight inches long, as I live! How could it have got here! Flung aside out of some trawl-net, perhaps! Well, wherever it may have come from, it is a treasure, a perfect treasure!"

Thus soliloquized Uncle Rob as he poked about among his darling rocks, in the vicinity of Barnes and Bessie; but as yet they were concealed from his sight, as he had not turned the corner into the cove.

"Come along, you lovely little annelide," he continued, affectionately addressing his new-found curiosity, which, to uninitiated eyes resembled nothing so much as a small green cucumber covered with bristles. "Won't the old woman be delighted to make your acquaintance;" and he proceeded to wrap up his treasure with great tenderness and circumspection in the folds of his pocket-handkerchief.

While thus engrossed, he turned into the cove. Bessie caught sight of him first, and Uncle Rob, fearing lest he should be one too many, made a movement to retire, but Bessie

hastily advanced as if to invite his presence, so he thought better of it and stood his ground. He perceived immediately that something had taken place, but, with the delicacy characteristic of natures like his, he affected to observe nothing, and, as Bessie joined him, he held out his precious sea-mouse, carefully unfolding its wrappings, that she might be enchanted with the sight.

"See, little Bess," he said, chuckling with much inward satisfaction, "what a beautiful annelide! I found it a few yards from this spot. Won't this be something to show the old woman?"

But somehow the view of it did not inspire Bessie with such rapturous admiration as Uncle Rob had possibly expected; she regarded it indeed with an expression very much akin to disgust.

"Uncle," she said, in a strangely-agitated voice,—though her remark was a commonplace one enough,—“tell me, what time is it? Should we not be going home?”

"Yes," he said, seeing the tears again ready to fall. "What is it all about, Bessie, my child?"

For Barnes had already started on his

solitary return walk, and they two were alone on the beach.

"You have not been trifling with that poor boy, have you, Bess?" and his voice assumed a shade of sternness.

"No, no!" she cried, her self-control forsaking her, as she clung to him and laid her weeping face upon his sympathizing breast, "O no, Uncle; you cannot believe I would be so base?"

"No, my dear, I should never think it of you," he answered soothingly. "But tell me then why could not you give the poor fellow the answer he wanted?"

"There were reasons, Uncle; indeed, indeed there were good reasons why I could not."

Uncle Rob looked up at the jagged face of the cliff, and his kind face grew greatly distressed.

"Here, where he risked his life for you, Bess, my dear, could you not prevail upon yourself to reward him?"

"Oh, Uncle! anything but that! Anything but that!" sobbed Bessie. "But *that* is just the one thing he wants," said Uncle Rob. "I suppose anything else would not satisfy him."

"He is so good, so noble," sobbed Bessie.

"It makes my heart ache to have been obliged to grieve him, but I could not say yes ; it would not have been right."

"Well, well, my dear, you know best, no doubt," returned Uncle Rob cheerfully, anxious to soothe her, for she trembled so much that he felt a little uneasy. "But I will confess to you that I had cherished the hope that you two might grow to like each other, and so had your aunt. However, cheer up, lassie ; take my arm, and we will go home, and get a good dinner to drive dull care away."

Bessie, with a violent effort, controlled herself, and took fast hold of his arm. So they turned homewards, and beheld the form of Barnes diminishing in the distance before them.

"Cheer up, Bessie !" repeated Uncle Rob, benevolently trying to soothe her ; "don't break your heart about Barnes ; he will get over it. Why, I was once in the same way myself and ready to believe it was all up with me, because I was refused by your aunt the first time I proposed."

"Refused by Aunt Patty !" echoed Bessie, in astonishment ; "why, Uncle, I never heard of that before !"

"No, how should you?" returned he, delighted to find he had succeeded in diverting her thoughts. "Nevertheless, so it was; and I can tell you I was so bad that I made up my mind to blow my brains out. Yet you see here I stand, as whole a man as you would wish to see, and likely to be troubled with an affectionate wife for some time to come!"

"But Uncle, tell me how was it?" said Bessie, intensely curious.

"Ah! you would like to know, would you?" he said, with a sly twinkle; "trust a woman to ferret out the particulars of a love-story. Well, I will relate it to you, if you will solemnly promise not to tell it to your dearest friend under the seal of secrecy, for she will assuredly repeat it under the same condition to her dearest friend, and then the matter will be all over the parish."

Bessie laughingly promised; and Uncle Rob, first of all feeling whether his precious aphrodite were safe in his pocket, began.

"When I first courted your aunt, then the pretty Martha Grantham, she was only seventeen, and I was five and twenty. I was poor then, but with fair prospects, and blessed with health, and (so at least I

flattered myself) a moderate share of good looks."

Bessie could not forbear thinking that his share of good looks must have been very moderate indeed, even in those days; for he was, as we have elsewhere stated, one of the plainest, as he was also undeniably one of the best, of men.

"Well, pretty Patty Grantham was a bit of a coquette and rather encouraged my attentions, as I thought, so I concluded she meant to have me as soon as I should think proper to propose. But in those days I little knew the fickle sex! One morning, dressed all in my best for the occasion, I started for the home of my adored Patty, determined to learn my fate, and be put out of suspense. (Not that I feared a refusal, mind you.) As I passed up to the house door through the garden, I chanced to hear the voices of two girls talking behind some bushes, and one of the voices I knew was Patty's. I stopped involuntarily, perhaps hoping to hear some encomium on my perfections uttered by my beloved one. But instead of this—what a shock went through my whole system, as I heard her pronounce the words,—'No, indeed, Sophia. I will

never marry a stupid saw-bones !' Imagine my feelings, Bessie, my dear. Was not that a taking down for me ? 'Stupid,' indeed, and 'Sawbones !' It was too great a blow. I turned and fled back to my lodgings, revolving as I went, the different modes of putting an end to myself in order that I might choose the one which would leave me the most interesting subject for an inquest, for I had some wild hope that my beloved, pierced with remorse, might come and weep over my remains. I had not yet decided the knotty question when I found myself once more in my bachelor apartment. How sordid it looked, how gloomy and wretched ; whereas, when I had left it, glowing with hope and filled with joyous anticipations, it had seemed like a snug little paradise. I sat down to write a farewell letter, but just then it occurred to me that I was very hungry, and that I might as well dine. There was no reason, I argued, why a man should go out of the world on an empty stomach. I would have a good dinner at my club, and finish my letter and polish off my woes afterwards. Well, they gave me a capital dinner, and I did full justice to it. I am in a position to state from experience that a man's

love, be it ever so desperate, or his disappointment ever so keen, does not interfere with his enjoyment of a good dinner. He can eat first and sorrow afterwards; or else he can love and eat at the same time. It is surprising what a difference a well-lined waistcoat makes in man's views of life. After my second glass of wine I beheld the question in an entirely new light. Waving my empty wine-glass in a theatrical manner, (there was nobody present, my dear,) I cried, 'Shall I, wasting in despair, die because a woman's fair?' And to that searching question my invigorated heart replied, 'Not a bit of it.' So I went home, Bess, tore up the letter, and here I am, you see, brains and all, whole and sound!"

"But Uncle," said Bessie, interested in spite of herself, "how did you manage to get Aunt Patty at last, after all this?"

"Ah!" said Uncle Rob, looking profoundly mysterious, "that is a long story, my dear. It will do nicely for another day. But you may conclude that, the second time I asked her, she had got over her objection to marrying a 'stupid saw-bones.' Here we are, nearly at home," added the kindly old man. "And I told you this little episode of my own expe-

rience, to prove to you Bess, my dear, that men's hearts are not easily broken ; they may think themselves in a very bad way at first, and be ready to shuffle off this mortal coil as if the weight of it could no longer be endured. But they always get over it, my dear, they always get over it ! ”

Bessie felt greatly comforted, and she even grew cheerful under this consoling view of the matter.

But poor Barnes, as he took his solitary homeward way, felt nothing of such consolation. To him it seemed as if he would never get over it ; for Bessie's answer he knew to be final.

The hope he had so long cherished, and, as it were, lived upon, till it had become a part of himself, had been snatched from him, and it seemed as if his strength of mind and body had given way at the same moment. Had it fallen to Uncle Rob's lot to administer consolation to him also, he would have exclaimed cheerfully, “ Never say die, my boy ! You are sure to feel very down-hearted at first, but you will get over it. Don't break your heart because one foolish girl has said ‘ no ’ instead of ‘ yes. ’ There are as good fish in the sea as have ever been caught, ” &c., &c., with

other wise saws of an equally original, novel, and soothing description.

But Barnes did not seek comfort from Uncle Rob. He disclosed his grief to no one, not even to Saunders. Silently and patiently he set himself to bear the heavy burden of disappointment. Silently and patiently he went about to school his heart to suffer and make no complaint.

CHAPTER XIII.

“MERCY on us ! If that isn’t Mr. Elwood ! Well, wonders have never done ceasing !”

It was Tots who, breathless with surprise, uttered the above slightly incoherent remark, as she stood with Bessie by the wooden landing-stage, watching the visitors land from the steamer. This interesting event always caused an intense excitement to prevail once a week among the population of Ravensbay, visitors and aborigines alike. Every Monday evening at seven o’clock, or half an hour before, the scattered groups and parties perambulating the sands, would begin to converge towards the landing-stage, when the tide happened to be out. At other times the same impulse attracted the whole multitude to the harbour. It might be supposed, from the eagerness with which old and young, gentle and simple, mustered at the expected

landing-place, that every member of the heterogeneous assembly was inspired with the hospitable desire of welcoming some friend or other, whose arrival was thus anxiously looked for. He, however, who should thus rashly conclude, would be ignorant indeed of the motive impulse which actuated the Ravensbayites. Curiosity, born of idleness, was the sole and entire motive of more than two-thirds of the eager crowd, and the other third might almost be made up by policemen (few in number, but making up this deficiency by being great in stature, and corpulent in or out of proportion), car-drivers awaiting fares, touters for the several lodging-houses, and a mob of youths tender in years but precocious in mischief, the remainder comprising those who went on purpose to meet and welcome expected friends. Indeed, the visitors of Ravensbay had cause to be thankful that there existed this weekly amusement, since they might otherwise have suffered from the lack of something to do. There was no regular band at this benighted place, nor any of those diversions usually to be had at more fashionable sea-side resorts. There existed not even a promenade where in the evening

youth and beauty (to say nothing of middle age and plainness) might display their attractions of dress and address.

A concert was a rare event indeed. No Volunteer Reviews were ever known to take place in the neighbourhood, for the conclusive reason that there were no Volunteers to review, since the gallant corps, which in the first heat of patriotic fervour had enrolled themselves under the denomination of the Ravensbay Rifles, had long ago dwindled away to one solitary representative, and he had given up the attempt to form himself into a battalion on public occasions, finding that the effect, somehow, was not imposing. A Flower Show had not been known in the vicinity within the memory of the "oldest inhabitant." Since Ravensbay was so behindhand in civilization as to lack all these sources of entertainment, it may well be believed that the one excitement which the place afforded was made the most of, and became an event to be joyfully anticipated from week to week. The steamer never varied her hour of arriving, and, somehow, by some secret understanding between the Steam Packet Company and the laws which govern the tides, entered into expressly for the aggravation of visitors, it

nearly always managed to be low water at seven o'clock on Monday evenings. Now this circumstance, though by no means calculated to soothe the over-wrought feelings of passengers, since it obliged them to land on the wooden stage before alluded to, yet contributed rather to heighten the enjoyment of spectators. It prolonged the excitement of seeing the passengers land, and enabled the sympathizing crowd to take a careful survey of each person; for, as the stage was but narrow, the unfortunate travellers were compelled to defile along it, thus running the gauntlet betwixt two observant rows of curious human beings.

Now I think I may venture to affirm that scarcely any one, after a day's journey, of which seven hours at least have been passed at sea, feels in a condition to face the criticism of society. It is bad enough to be bundled out of a steamer, at the risk of a sousing, into a rowing boat, and thence heaved on to a rickety wooden pier, slimy with sea-weed, along which it is necessary to proceed with infinite caution, at the risk of describing singular vagaries in deportment in consequence of the uncertain nature of the footing. But when to all these trifling draw-

backs is added the ordeal of undergoing the scrutiny of hundreds of eyes when one is painfully conscious of personal charms obscured or obliterated by the accidents of voyaging, and of dress dishevelled from the same causes, the result can scarcely prove soothing to the nerves of the unlucky victims. Might they not console themselves, however, by considering that the interests of the minority should always yield to those of the majority? So that it must be after all but right and equitable that the suffering few should contribute to the entertainment of the amusement-loving many. Also the victimized ones might find further consolation in the thought that in the various ups and downs of life it would probably happen that they, in their turn, would become the victimizers, and so indemnify themselves for their former sufferings by extracting diversion from the similar woes of others.

At all events it now came about with regard to the inmates of No. 2, Promenade Terrace, that whereas but five weeks before they had undergone all the miseries incident to landing, they were now, on this particular evening, vastly entertained by beholding the like miseries exemplified in the case of others.

With them, as with fully two-thirds of the assembled crowd, curiosity had been the main attraction, for they had no idea that any of their friends were likely to be on board. On the following Monday, it is true, they promised themselves the delight of meeting Brand; but on this occasion they had gone with the multitude for the ignoble purpose of "having some sport," as Tots phrased it.

It had happened that there existed nothing special to be done that evening, and everybody became a prey to the sensation of being surprisingly bored. Under these circumstances the happy idea had occurred to the fertile brain of Tots, that it would be fun to go and see the steamer land her passengers. If they found no immense excitement in it, still it would be something to do. The notion was favourably received by the younger members of the party, though no entreaties could prevail on the uncle and aunt to join in the "sport." They declared they could watch just as well from the window, and with infinitely greater comfort to themselves. So the three girls and Basil strolled out upon the sands, and looked out eagerly for the first faint indications of smoke

appearing round the Head. It was visible at length,—increased,—and gradually the graceful vessel rounded the point, and immediately, as by one impulse, all the scattered groups united into one stream, and rushed towards the landing-stage. The girls and Basil, animated by a kindred spirit, followed the chase, but they found that the pursuit of pleasure is not always unattended with inconvenience. That evening the sands seemed wetter than usual, and were here and there intersected by streams. At the shore end of the landing-stage lay a calm and shallow lake, picturesque as to its effect, but scarcely likely to be admired by passengers, who, in order to arrive upon the beach, would be constrained to wade through it.

The trifling drawback of having their feet wet through, seemed to weigh but slightly with our amusement-seekers, who presently found themselves mixed up in a great crowd of all sorts, whose eyes and heads were all turned in one direction, and whose tongues seemed all to be going at once. The steamer, reaching the middle of the bay, gracefully turned and immediately fired a salute. This was a moment of intense excitement, for now the packet-boats, which had been lying *perdu*

all the while at the end of the wooden pier, emerged from their obscurity, their unwieldy length propelled by only one pair of oars. The steamer, having cast anchor at a respectful distance, calmly awaited their approach, and, in due course, they forged slowly up alongside. Then commenced a bustle on board, compared to which the excitement among the disturbed inmates of an ant-hill is as nothing.

Streams of human beings and vast piles of luggage were handed down into the first boat, which, being of capacious dimensions, took some time to fill. At length, however, being crammed with humanity and band-boxes till the edge was almost on a level with the water, it slowly turned towards the shore, leaving another detachment to be crowded into the second boat.

Now was a moment of intense suspense. The anxious crowd on the shore gaze in rapt interest on the approach of the heavily-freighted and unwieldy tub, to which so many lives are consigned. Only two oars to propel that huge load ! It seems a problem whether they will reach the land before next morning, so imperceptible is their progress.

“Do you think they will arrive safely?”

said Sophy, in momentary dread of seeing them all sink beneath the surface with the same silence and stately deliberation as they approach.

"Safe as houses, miss," responds a good-humoured man standing by. "Why bless your heart, there is no talk of danger."

"But so many in one boat," Sophy continued apprehensively.

"To be sure," replied her informant reflectively; "it is a power of people. It is a wonder to me what a terrible deal of travelling there is doing on people now-a-days."

Sophy's busy brains were much exercised for a space to unravel the intricacies of the Islander's last observation, but before she had arrived at any lucid understanding of the same, the boat touched the stage, and forthwith two or three policemen, forgetting their natural vocation of being purely ornamental, actually went the length of waving back the crowd, in order that the passengers might have a clear space whereon to land. Then began such a bustle, such a hauling of old women out of the boat, such a hushing of squalling children, such a grabbing at luggage. Highly entertained, the girls looked on, while the dishevelled train passed before

them, human beings in all stages and degrees of limpness and dejection. Men supporting feeble and draggled-looking wives, boys embracing convulsively cricket-bats and fishing-rods, which with much ingenuity they stuck into people's limbs and eyes, serving-maids tottering under cloaks and shawls, little children, whose weary feet would get entangled between the boards of the rickety little pier, and toothless hags ferociously holding on to band-boxes.

"Poor souls!" said Tots, who had the grace to feel a passing impulse of pity. "Bess, do look at them; they have all got complexions like mouldy-lemons. Good gracious! can it be that we ever looked like that? The thought is agony."

"I have no doubt we did," replied Bessie, "on the memorable evening of our own arrival."

And now arose a confusion in the crowd on the other side of the landing-stage. A restive horse in one of the cars, began to kick and plunge. No sooner had three women, a baby, and a tower of luggage been stowed therein, than the misguided animal commenced a series of jibbings and backings, which threatened to shoot the unfortunate

fares out into the pools of water beneath the landing-stage. The driver, who had left the reins in order to reduce the unwieldy pile of luggage into reasonable compass, appeared perplexed, between his desire of running to the horse's head, and his anxiety to prevent his fares from being forcibly ejected. The crowd gave way quickly on either hand, fearful of the excited animal's legs bestowing sundry kicks among them. The policemen, following the instincts of their order, looked carefully in another direction, and were intently doing nothing some distance off. The women grew terrified, screamed, and tried to scramble out, the baby squalled, the driver, endeavouring to soothe them, represented that all would be right in a moment, while the horse seemed doing his utmost to stave in the front of the vehicle. More screaming. Shouts from sundry daring members of the crowd, "Run to his head!" But nobody ran to his head; everybody seemed to be about to do it, but nobody did it. The driver, wound up to a pitch of phrensy between the women and the baby and the luggage, bawled out also, "Run to his head!" as the creature backed and plunged.

"Blockheads," muttered Basil, who, stand-

ing with the girls, had been watching the proceedings.

He probably alluded to the vacillating crowd, sundry members of which made spasmodic movements at intervals, as if about to dart forward and "run to his head," but invariably repressed their ardour when within a yard or two of the object in question. In another moment he had sprung upon the landing-stage and down on the other side, and immediately after he was holding the animal's rein, soothing and quieting it, till its tremors subsided, and the terrified females permitted themselves and their goods to be finally adjusted.

"Your young man is terrible smart, though," said a voice at Tots's elbow; and looking up, she beheld the good-natured Islander who had endeavoured to quiet Sophy's fears with regard to the safety of the passengers in the boats.

This personage, a tall, broad-shouldered Scandinavian, with a magnificent yellow beard, was gazing at Basil with an expression of much approbation, and therefore had the good luck to miss the scathing look of indignation wherewith Tots would fain have shrivelled him to a mummy for his imper-

tinent remark, so at least she thought it. Her "young man!" what a low idea. She shuddered at the vulgar expression.

But Sophy, who plainly perceived that the man's only intention was to express friendly admiration, was greatly tickled at his mode of putting it, and could have found in her heart to enter into conversation with him, but that he moved away, and was lost in the crowd. By this time the second packet-boat had come alongside, and a fresh batch of unfortunate travellers were beginning their uneasy march over the uneven wooden surface. The crowd closed up again round the three girls, who found themselves standing in a pool of water, for the tide had turned, and was slowly stealing its way over the sands.

"This is intolerable," mumbled Tots, growing cross; "Basil ought not to have left us. I can't even see him now, amongst all those people. Here we are left alone amidst a heap of boorish Islanders, who seem to think nothing of treading on our toes and insulting us."

"Hush," said Bessie, "don't talk such nonsense. Some one may hear us, and none of them have shown the least rude-

ness. I think I never knew a more polite mob."

"Much you know of mobs," returned Tots disdainfully, and she turned to see if some more amusement might be extracted out of the limp and pensive voyagers. Presently a tall, familiar figure, walking along with a jaunty air, caught her eye.

"Mercy on us," she cried, "if that isn't Mr. Elwood! Look, Bess! There, there! between that skinny old hag, and that lanky man with a pale face trimmed with black fringe. Don't you see him? There, he actually recognizes us!"

The gentleman in question, with a quickness of perception which did him credit, had spied out amid the crowd the face he remembered so well, and which had struck him with so much admiration, that at one period in his love-lorn stage, he had actually penned some touching lines, addressed to the "Bright eyes of T. B." (This wonderful production, however, had never been submitted for the inspection of her who had inspired it. To his sister only did Mr. Elwood divulge the secret of his passion; and to her he had shown the verses, asking for a candid opinion, which he doubted not would be highly complimentary both to

his taste and genius. He had descended to great depths of pathos in this composition, and therefore was considerably surprised and not a little disgusted, when his sister, a married woman who had passed through the deep waters of romance, and landed high and dry upon the shore of common sense, only returned the verses with the comment that "They were so pathetic, that they bordered on the funny.")

Now that he beheld once more the cruel beauty who had, alas! given her heart to another (for Tots's engagement was known and canvassed at all the little coteries of Wareham), Mr. Elwood could not resist the exquisite agony of again hearing her voice and looking into her eyes. So he leaped from the pier, and was beside the girl in a moment, while Tots, delighted to behold her old admirer, greeted him cordially.

"Uncle will be so pleased to see you!" she said, and this was true enough, for with Uncle Rob "Joe Elwood" had always been rather a favourite.

"You ladies all alone in this crowd!" said this gentleman, with chivalrous compassion for their forlorn condition. "Oh, allow me the pleasure of escorting you through the

press. Perhaps you are expecting some one ; if you will describe your friend, I may perhaps be able to tell if such a one were on board."

"Oh no," said Tots, "we are not expecting any one, and we are not alone exactly. Mr. Hyde only left us a moment ago."

"Mr. Hyde—ah!" said Mr. Elwood with a gasping sigh, like one who has received a stab, but who resolves that no human being shall suspect his sufferings. "Can I not act then as your cavalier in his absence?"

"We shall be very glad," said Tots, answering for her sisters (who did not seem at all glad), "if you will be kind enough to see us safe to the house; I really don't know where Basil is, and I don't want to wait here any longer in the wet."

Mr. Elwood evidently congratulated himself internally upon having fallen upon his legs, to judge from the complacent expression which overspread his good-looking, but somewhat vapid, face.

They all turned homewards, and found themselves compelled to flounder through an amount of wet sand sufficient to damp the spirits of any one at all concerned about the welfare of his or her boots. But Tots's spirits

seemed to have risen in a marvellously short space of time, and she poured forth a most entertaining flood of chatter. She had begun to feel so sadly weary of late of the quiet sea-side that the sight of an old Wareham face seemed to inspire her with new life, especially as that face belonged to one whom she knew had at one time entertained a warm admiration for her. They grew quite confidential, these two ; while Bessie and Sophy lingered a little behind, hoping that Basil would turn up. Mr. Elwood informed his fair companion that he had found his health giving way in consequence of intense application. In fact he was fairly overworked, and had found it absolutely necessary to snatch a fortnight's holiday. He had felt convinced the sea air would set him up, and knowing that his old friend Dr. Galen had winged his flight to the Isle of Man, it occurred to him that it would be more pleasant to spend his fortnight near to friends, than to exile himself to some strange place.

“ But ”—he added, sinking his voice—
“ little did I anticipate the *happiness* that awaited me on my first landing at Ravensbay ”! Tots looked by no means displeased at this implied compliment. Indeed she felt it quite

refreshing to be so addressed once more, for since the defection of her once sworn knight Saunders Onslow, she had been longing daily for some one to say pretty things to her. Admiration, implied or expressed, had become almost necessary to her, and since Basil did not indulge her in her favourite taste, she was forced to seek for it elsewhere.

As they neared the house, Uncle Rob, telescope in hand, appeared advancing towards them, and he held out his hand with a cordial welcome, when he perceived that his nieces had picked up an old friend and favourite.

"Ah, Joe Elwood!" he said cheerfully; "welcome to the tight little Island. You have just landed, I suppose."

"Just landed, sir," returned the gratified youth, naturally flattered to find himself among friends on the very first night of his arrival.

"Had a good passage, eh? Well, I needn't ask; sea as calm as milk—has been all day. But come, let's enter the house, you must want some refreshment; the old woman will be delighted to see you."

So saying, the hospitable old gentleman ushered them into Aunt Patty's presence.

Aunt Patty was sure to receive graciously any one of whom her husband approved, so it came to pass that in a very short time Mr. Elwood was made to feel very much at his ease. Besides he was naturally blessed with a moderate amount of assurance, and his manner was marked by singular grace, born of self-complacency. He flattered Uncle Rob by consulting him as to the Hotel whereat he should take up his quarters for a fortnight, and Uncle Rob felt quite pleased at being appealed to as an authority on such a question, though he knew no more of Ravensbay hotels than his questioner did. Nevertheless he confidently recommended "The Albert," as being very near and facing the sea: so to the "Albert" Mr. Elwood declaring his intention of betaking himself. All this while Bessie was wondering where Basil could be, while Tots, whose more immediate business it was to concern herself about his movements, bestowed not a passing thought upon the matter. Not until they were all seated at the supper-table did he appear; and then he was much astonished at finding a stranger present. He treated Mr. Elwood to a haughty stare, followed by a cold bow, but that gentleman returned the

salutation with much suavity, for *he* was not to be disturbed in his serene composure by any personage so inconsiderable as Mr. Hyde.

"Why did you not wait for me?" asked Basil, as he took his seat beside Tots; and there was a dash of asperity in his tone, as of one who feels injured, and knows he has a right to complain. "I think I must have wasted half an hour looking for you in the crowd, I really began to fancy something was wrong."

"Oh, we were all right," said Tots composedly, and appearing in no way disturbed at her lover's vexation. "Mr. Elwood was kind enough to convoy us safely out of the crowd."

Hereupon Basil put up his eye-glass, and favoured that gentleman with a cool stare, after which he dropped it again, adding severely, "Another time, however, it would please me better, Tots, if you were not to run away in such a hurry."

"Come, come," said Uncle Rob, anxious to promote harmony. "Joe Elwood here is quite up to taking care of errant damsels, and indeed, from the ladies' account, it was *you* who ran away from *them*."

Basil, however, seemed determined not to be mollified. He was decidedly cross, evidently, for he maintained a lofty silence during the remainder of supper.

Bessie did not feel cheerful. She felt herself included in Basil's rebuke, and she could not but feel that he was comporting himself somewhat bearishly. But then Basil had grown bearish lately; it was almost as if some burden on his mind weighed down his once equable spirits and induced occasional fits of gloomy unsociability. Toward herself he had grown very distant, and yet at times she would become suddenly aware that he was watching her intently; or a sudden softening of his tone, if he addressed her, would prove that at least his coldness was not caused by any dislike or displeasure, but must arise from some unfathomable cause which she often puzzled her brains to discover, invariably failing in the attempt. Sometimes she felt vaguely uneasy at his incomprehensible behaviour, but kept to her resolution of taking no notice. So she went quietly on her own way, fighting a battle with herself daily, and all unconscious that Basil also was passing through a similar struggle. This evening, however, Basil grew a little more

gracious, and even condescended to chat with Mr. Elwood, as if anxious to atone in a measure for having shown him such scant courtesy at first. Moreover, when the latter rose to take leave, saying he must go and look for the hotel, Basil actually offered to accompany him and show him the way.

Mr. Elwood accepted the offer with his usual complacency, and bade good-night to the hospitable circle, leaving a very pleasing impression behind him for the most part. Tots was especially pleased. Mr. Elwood had evidently not forgotten her, and perhaps his agreeable attentions would serve to rouse Basil to a proper sense of those charms of which he seemed now to make so little account.

Thus meditating, Tots fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

"SEE, my dear," said Uncle Rob, coming in triumphant one morning, after some hours' poking about among the rocks; "have I not had a good morning's work? I have found some really valuable and rare *Crustacea*, by no means common species, I can tell you," and he turned out one of his deep coat-pockets, scattering over the table a miscellaneous heap of treasures. "Here is the *Pisa Gibsii*, covered with sponge; a few beautiful little shells of *Trochus*, one with a little hermit-crab peeping out (poor fellow, I am afraid he has paid the debt of Nature). Look how this *Trochus* is enveloped with a thick cushion of *Holichondria suberica*!" and Uncle Rob, picking out one from the heterogeneous assortment, held it towards Aunt Patty.

"How curious!" she cried, taking it from him, and willing to bestow encomiums on

whatever met with her lord and master's approval, at the same time calling to Bessie, who sat reading in the window, to contribute her admiration. "But," said Uncle Rob, looking vastly pleased, "the best has yet to come. Look what my friends the fishermen got for me in their dredging-nets." And the enthusiastic naturalist proceeded to turn out the contents of another pocket, while his wife looked up with eager anticipation. "Look here," he cried, "Pectunculus shells, covered with Ascidiaë, Emarginula fissura, Capulus Hungaricus—"

"Stop, stop, my dear!" ejaculated Aunt Patty, as the Professor hauled out of this receptacle a quantity of seaweed, wherein at intervals shells might be observed. "Don't put all that sloppy stuff on the table-cloth. It will ruin it for ever. Here, Bessie, my love, bring me a newspaper to put underneath; and surely, my dear, you might have known that your coat would be utterly spoiled by using the pocket for such a purpose. See, the cloth is soaked through. Oh, dear me! and I re-lined that coat only the other day."

"Fudge!" returned the naturalist in great disdain, "what signifies an old coat?"

You will have to put a fresh lining in it, and that will give you nice work—the only way of keeping a woman out of mischief, eh, Bess ?”

“Nice work, indeed,” retorted his injured lady ; “do you think I have nothing to do besides lining your pockets for you to fill them with seaweed ?” And she put on a voice of great indignation.

“It must be dried immediately,” she added, endeavouring to assume the stern air of one deeply displeased ; and, raising herself on tip-toe, she helped him out of his coat, and marched off with it.

It was characteristic of Uncle Rob that his mood was capable of changing from grave to gay, and from gay to grave, instantaneously, so that at one moment he would appear brimming with mirth, and chuckling at some outrageous joke of his own, while in the next his dear old rugged countenance would be overcast with a midnight gloom, and a sadness shadow it as deep as if he could never find in his heart to smile more. One of these variations of mood was upon him now, and Bessie saw that he was not in cue for any more joking.

“Bessie, my love,” he said, “have you

fancied at all that there is a sort of coolness between our pretty Totty and her intended?"

Bessie was startled to find that Uncle Rob, whom she had supposed would be the last to observe such things, had already discovered this truth, which had been patent to herself for some time past. Uncle Rob went on, without giving her time to answer, "She is too fond of having silly young butterflies fluttering round her, and feeding her with honeyed admiration. To be sure she is so pretty, it is not to be wondered at. All women like admiration, eh, Bess? Even you don't feel any deadly resentment against a certain worthy young fellow for having discovered that you had some attractions of your own."

But this allusion to poor, sensitive, sorrowing Barnes cut Bessie to the heart, and the kind old man instantly saw that he was treading on dangerous ground. So he glanced off again to the affairs of his younger niece. "I think our friend Basil feels a little annoyed at seeing his blooming Tots so much in the society of Joe Elwood. A very agreeable young fellow, Joe Elwood. Still one man naturally objects to another man

making himself irresistible to his affianced one. What do you think yourself? Has he ever complained to you about it?"

"No," said Bessie, "he has never said anything to me. But he may have mentioned the matter to Tots, for anything we know."

"Not he," said Uncle Rob, "a man doesn't like to make a row, and thereby prove that he feels jealous. I remember a little after Patty and I were engaged, she went on in a mild way with a gay young captain, whom she frequently met at a friend's house. (She was a bit of a flirt, in those days, was your aunt.) Well, I used to get so mad, I was ready to knock the fellow down whenever I met him, but somehow I didn't like to say a word to Patty herself, because then she would be sure to turn round and laugh at me for being jealous; for, you see, you women always manage to be in the right yourselves, and to put us in the wrong. I dare say Basil, poor fellow, feels a little sore. Depend upon it that was the reason of his going off this morning for a day or two, that he might cool down upon it, and reason himself into a good-humour again."

"Perhaps so," said Bessie sadly, feeling that Basil was not acting wisely in leaving

Tots entirely dependent on Mr. Elwood for male society.

"Perhaps so!" repeated Uncle Rob, "depend upon it, it *is* so. Now Bess, my dear, you are a wise little woman. Could not you reason with Totty, gently and kindly, you know, and just represent to her that Basil does not like it, and that she ought to snub Joe Elwood a little, just to please Basil, you know?"

"I will try, Uncle," said Bessie; but in her inmost heart she knew she might as well talk to the wind, as reason with Tots. Many times lately had she tried it, but her sister would not "stand any interference," as she expressed it, and turned sulky when Bessie persisted in pursuing the subject. Aunt Patty had not as yet observed anything wrong, for she sat in the house a good deal, and most of the flirtation was carried on during walks and excursions on the shore. Besides, her nature was so entirely unsuspecting, that any delinquency required to be distinctly brought under her notice before she would awake to the knowledge of its existence.

Tots was revelling to-day in a sense of freedom from the silent reproach of her lover's presence, for the night before Basil had ab-

ruptly announced his intention of making a walking tour round the Island, which would probably occasion his absence for three days, or thereabouts. He had not purposed undertaking the expedition alone, for he invited Mr. Elwood to accompany him, and had even urged his request, possibly because he felt a vague uneasiness in the thought of leaving him behind ; but if his intention had been to withdraw from his betrothed the temptation to indulge in her propensity for flirting, his aim was defeated. Mr. Elwood politely and gracefully declined. He did not as yet "feel his health sufficiently restored" to allow of his "undertaking so much fatigue," &c., &c. So Basil was somewhat reluctantly obliged to set off alone.

He took an affectionate farewell of them all, seeming rather reluctant to start when it came to the point. Catching Tots on the wing, as she went flying through the hall, he was observed by Sophy to detain her in conversation for a few moments, and seemed to be earnestly laying some injunctions upon her. But Tots had only answered carelessly, as if in a hurry, and scarcely giving him time to kiss her, she had darted through the hall door down to the beach. Then Basil went slowly

into the sitting-room, where Bessie happened to be alone, writing. Uncle Rob had gone off, as usual, curiosity-hunting; Aunt Patty was in the kitchen regions, on household cares intent; Sophy, having said good-bye on the stairs, had gone back to wrestle with some unmanageable trimming on her hat. So Bessie was by herself, and Basil had expected to find her so.

"Wish me a pleasant excursion, Bessie," he said, holding out his hand. But his eyes, grave and sad, expressed no expectation of much pleasure.

"I do, with all my heart," said Bessie cordially; "and don't be away more than three days, if you can help it, Basil." This she added earnestly, for she did not like to think of Tots being left long without the restraint of his presence.

"Would you miss me, then?" he inquired, in an eager, gratified tone.

"Yes," said Bessie, "though not so much, of course, as poor Tots will." But even as she said this she knew that she was not speaking the truth.

"Good-bye," he said, his manner suddenly freezing again, and his voice sounding indifferent.

They shook hands, and he was gone. Bessie turned to watch him from the window, but he soon turned up a back street and vanished from her sight. She began once more her letter-writing, with a sinking of heart and a dreary sense of forlornness, which oppressed her almost to tears. The morning was fine, but she had not cared to go out, and so she wrote and wrote; and in the very act of pouring out some at least of her thoughts and fancies (though not those nearest her heart) to Brand, she found a source of relief. Presently Aunt Patty, sewing in hand, came in, and settled herself to work; and the two were undisturbed till the return of Uncle Rob from his morning stroll, with what results we have already seen.

Tots's morning had been spent in a much more exciting manner. When she left the house, after bidding Basil good-bye, she had fully made up her mind to bathe, for the weather was truly inviting. But it so happened that everybody else seemed actuated by the same impulse that morning, so that the number of bathing-machines being strictly limited, they were already engaged half a dozen deep when Tots went to inquire for one. She consoled herself for her disappoint-

ment by reflecting, that bathing would place her under the necessity of doing up her hair afresh, before she would be again fit for society. Society, in her sense of the word, meaning Mr. Elwood, who was likely to turn up at any moment, being a privileged guest at No. 2.

So Tots, revolving these things in her mind, grew content. She and Sophy were sitting on the beach, the latter, as usual, sketching. Sophy was now attempting landscape, and had become quite enthusiastic in this her favourite pursuit; and she really promised to turn out no indifferent artist. Uncle Rob had promised that if Miss Grantham would spare her to them for a few weeks, after their return to Wareham, she should have lessons from a master. But though the idea had filled Sophy with transport, yet she felt there was but a slender chance of winning over her inexorable aunt. Tots amused herself on this particular morning by nudging the artist's elbow, and giving sly twitches to her paper, till Sophy was roused to expostulate, when she grew weary of this diversion; and looked about her in search of some new sport.

Presently she espied Mr. Elwood afar off,

advancing with the complacent air of one who feels sure of his welcome. He sat down beside the girls, much to the disgust of the younger one, for Sophy did not approve of Mr. Elwood. With the uncharitableness of extreme youth she had passed a severe judgment on him, setting him down for a silly, empty-headed creature, almost as uninteresting and conceited as Saunders Onslow. Therefore she considered him no pleasing addition to their company.

The gentleman, however, happily unconscious of any such sentiments, succeeded in making the time pass very agreeably for Tots, until she grew weary of sitting still, and proposed a stroll.

Sophy had completed her sketch, and was quite ready to move, so the three bent their steps in the direction of the romantic little glen, before mentioned as sloping up from the shore towards the high road. Now this glen abounded in varieties of fern, and even some rarer sorts might be found in considerable abundance by the careful observer. One of the charms wherewith Mr. Elwood sought to captivate the hearts of unwary young ladies, was to affect an immense enthusiasm about ferns, having discovered in the course of his

career that fern-collecting was rather a favourite pursuit among the more youthful of the fair sex. Hence he cunningly concluded that he might ingratiate himself with them by pretending a sympathetic ardour in this delightful occupation.

After a great deal of small-talk, banter, and repartee, in which Mr. Elwood was decidedly worsted, Sophy, being disgusted with what she mentally termed his "drivelling absurdities," sat herself down on a large stone in the bed of the stream, declaring that she meant to sketch a little, and if they wanted to go any further they would find her in the same place on their return.

The two strolled on therefore, neither of them grieving at Sophy's defection, for she acted unconsciously as a considerable restraint upon their intercourse.

"Good gracious!" said Tots suddenly, in a tone of alarm; "there is a man, surely, asleep in the grass there! Do you think he will jump up and be rude to us?"

"Miss Theodosia need fear nothing so long as I have the happiness to be beside her," returned Mr. Elwood, drawing himself up and assuming the air of an invincible Greatheart, ready to do battle with any number of giants.

When, however, they drew nearer to the recumbent figure they perceived it to be Barnes Onslow, who, weary probably with his stroll, had laid himself down in the cool grass. He raised his hat as they passed by, and even the careless Tots was struck with the extreme pallor of his countenance, the dark shadows surrounding his sunken eyes, and the air of intense languor pervading his whole frame.

“What have you done to our friend Barnes?” inquired Mr. Elwood in a low tone, when they were a little distance off. “Has he, too, fallen a victim to Miss Bowsted’s charming cruelty?”

“Oh!” said Tots, “I have done nothing to him; but I shrewdly suspect he has received his dismissal from a young lady that shall be nameless.”

“Ah!” said Mr. Ellwood compassionately, “is he then suffering from unrequited affection? Poor fellow! he looks as if he did not intend to survive it;” and Mr. Elwood sighed, as one might do who had tasted of similar woes and knew what the feeling was like.

“I fancy,” said Tots, “that he will not live long; he always looks to me as if he

would damp off like a mouldy geranium," and she cast a look back, half amused, half pitying, at the languid Barnes, whose head had once more dropped on his folded arms.

"And is it thus that Miss Bowsted sports with feelings which she herself is too apt to cause?" said Mr. Elwood melodramatically, and laying his hand lightly on the left side of his waistcoat.

Tots felt secretly flattered to think how very far gone poor Mr. Elwood was, and she thought (with a little sigh, as she remembered her tied and bound condition) that her companion would make a delightful lover. So attentive, so adoring, so altogether different from Basil Hyde. Foolish girl, who could not distinguish between base metal merely gilded and pure gold! But perhaps Tots was one of those who are not capable of appreciating the sterling properties of the gold, and who are perfectly satisfied all their lives with its counterfeit, which often glitters more; and as glitter is all they care for, it suits their purpose better than the genuine metal.

This stroll was but one of several enjoyed by Tots and her former admirer, often without the knowledge of the old people, who would have taken the matter into their own hands,

probably, had they suspected the extent of Tots's delinquencies. Bessie tried yet again to remonstrate with her sister, as she had promised Uncle Rob, but with as little success as ever. Tots grew very angry at having her freedom interfered with. She declared it was bad enough to have Basil laying injunctions upon her, but when it came to her sisters interfering, she wished them to understand that she was quite capable of managing her own affairs.

Basil returned at the end of three days, looking pale and worn from excessive fatigue. Whatever Bessie thought about his looks, she made no comment, and he greeted her very coldly. It seemed as though, depressed and weary, he looked for some tenderness and sympathy from his betrothed, and longed to find rest and comfort in her companionship; for his manner to her immediately after his return was caressing and tender. She, however, radiant with high spirits and health, had nothing for him but caprices and snubbings; and, weary in mind and body, he felt, poor fellow, as if his prospects of future happiness and satisfaction in such daily companionship were poor indeed.

CHAPTER XV.

“DEAR, dear!” exclaimed Aunt Patty, “this is bad news indeed,” and the little woman’s eyebrows went up a quarter of an inch as her eyes met some intelligence not very pleasing in the letter she was perusing. It was shortly after breakfast on the day after Basil’s return, and only Bessie and her aunt were left in the house. The other young people had strolled outside, for the morning was delicious. Uncle Rob had been off like a shot, almost without giving himself time to swallow a morsel. He was in a wild phrensy of excitement concerning some discovery with regard to the geological formation of the rocks near to the memorable cove, which he fancied himself on the eve of making. Usually he liked to wait for the letters before settling himself to the pursuits of the day, but this morning he had been too impatient to be off on his geological quest. It fell to his lot, however, to expe-

rience the truth of the old saying, "More haste, less speed." It had slipped his memory, in the excitement of the moment, that, in order to pursue his discovery, he would require his invaluable assistant the hammer, and had sallied forth without it. When well on his way, gloating over the wonderful facts he would soon be in a position to submit to the consideration of the geological world, he was brought up short by the sudden recollection that he had set off without his indispensable weapon. How humiliating to the scientific mind, engaged in the elucidation of lofty and absorbing inquiries, to be arrested in its triumphant course of reasoning by so trivial a circumstance as the want of a hammer!

Uncle Rob gave vent to a mild expletive bearing reference to his own stupidity, and turned back towards the house. Before reaching his own door, whence but half an hour before he had issued triumphant, he had formed the resolution of confiding the reason of his unexpected return to no one; for he knew of old that such confidence would surely draw down upon him the derisive laughter of his womenkind. He chuckled with satisfaction at finding himself safe within his own

hall, unperceived by at least two of the girls and Basil, whose backs he had the happiness of viewing some distance off. Still there would be two of the enemy whom he could not escape, and he was still casting about in his mind how to ward off the searching inquiries of the "old woman," when he entered the dining-room. His entrance, however, was greeted with no exclamations of surprise, for Aunt Patty, still reading her letter, was too entirely engrossed by its contents to feel any emotions of curiosity concerning the movements of her lord. She was delighted indeed to see him, for now she could relieve the wrath and grief of her overcharged mind by falling upon him and pointing out to his less sagacious intellect what a great misfortune had fallen upon him in consequence of his disregard of her sage advice.

"Here is some bad news indeed!" she cried, waving the obnoxious letter as if it had been a banner of defiance. "Ah! if you had only believed me, my dear, when I emphatically warned you against confiding in that man, this would never have occurred. I remember the very words I said to you at the time when you were weak enough to yield to his representations and lend him £500. I remember

saying to you, 'Don't lend that man a penny, he does not look like an honest man. I can read it in his face that he never intends to repay you, although he is your own kinsman.' And now, here is a letter to tell us that he has given his creditors the slip, and gone off to Australia."

Here Aunt Patty was constrained to pause from want of breath, and this cessation of hostilities on her part enabled Uncle Rob to marshal his forces, and bring them up in due order for the defence. Instead of the indignant consternation which ought reasonably to have been elicited by such dire intelligence, Uncle Rob's countenance exhibited a placid expression as if he were not to be moved by anything that might befall, and he ejaculated in an under-tone,—

"Ah! just so."

The attacking force, being by this time re-organized for a fresh onslaught, again opened fire.

"Yes," said Aunt Patty, whose wrath rose high against every species of deceit and ingratitude, and who always grew fierce in proportion to the placidity of her better half. "Yes, the wretch! This is how he repays your generosity. Just when the sum he bor-

rowed falls due, instead of sending it to you with proper expressions of gratitude, he absconds to Australia, leaving you without any prospect of ever seeing your money again. But I thought it would come to this ; I never expected anything better from such a countenance as his."

Uncle Rob, perceiving that the brunt of the battle was over, subsided into his arm-chair with the aspect of a man not to be betrayed into any rash expressions, but as if his sole aim was to reason out the matter calmly.

"Well, my dear," he responded, "if you expected things to turn out as it seems they have done, why excite yourself so much about the matter now? You seem as much surprised as if you had never foreseen the issue."

But Aunt Patty, not prepared for being taken in flank in this manner, had no arguments ready at the moment ; so she looked breathlessly indignant.

"As to his face, my dear," continued her husband, seeing his advantage and following it up, "it is impossible for even a member of your penetrating sex to read on a man's countenance whether he means to pay his debts or not."

"The wretch !" exclaimed Aunt Patty with

all a woman's versatility, shifting the course of argument when she finds herself worsted on one tack, "I can't think how a man can have the face to borrow money when he knows he can never repay it, and of his own uncle too."

"I am not his own uncle, my love," replied Uncle Rob, swift to penetrate the weak spots in her armour. "He is really only a distant connection."

"All the worse," retorted his antagonist, "one would not be so surprised to find a man applying to his own relations, but when he squanders the money of one upon whom he has no claim, really it is monstrous!" And the fair logician paused triumphantly, as if conscious that she "had him there" at any rate.

Uncle Rob chuckled mirthfully: "O female woman!" he murmured, "upon whose versatile mind the most conclusive reasoning falls unheeded; skilled to shift her ground when she finds herself worsted on one point, and ready to take her stand upon another. Truly it were as wise to try and grasp an eel as to argue with a woman."

"So ungrateful," continued Aunt Patty, ignoring this aside, and resolved to have her

say out. "A poor miserable creature, whom you saved from beggary, and placed in a position of independence, basely to rob you of five hundred pounds. It makes me quite angry."

"So it seems, my love," he answered, with a sly twinkle.

"What do you mean to do?" inquired the indignant partner of his cares. "You should telegraph instantly to the head of the London Police, and tell him to send off a detective by the next vessel, to trace him and bring him back to the country of which he is not worthy and the friend whom he has basely wronged."

"Easy, Martha, my dear; I shall do nothing of the kind; so you may set your mind quite at rest on that point."

"And do you mean to say that you intend to sit down calmly under such an injury, and make *no* effort to recover your property?"

"None whatever," he answered, his serenity oddly contrasting with her fiery ebullitions of wrath. "Does it not strike you that when a man has no money, it is perhaps a misplaced expectation to look for any money from him? But had he robbed me of even a greater sum, I should be loath to proceed to extremities

against one who confided in my friendship."

"Confided in a fiddlestick!" replied Aunt Patty, in a scathing manner. "How did he manifest his confidence in your friendship, may I ask?"

"By coming to me to help him out of his difficulties," he answered gently. "Believe me, my dear wife, you might do worse things with your money, than lend it to a poor young man to keep him out of vice and misery. And although he has absconded, as you say, yet I wish him well; and may he do better in a new part of the world than he did in this. I should not be a whit surprised, if, one of these days, he were to return a rich man, in a position to pay me principal and interest twice over."

"Ah;" said Aunt Patty, still unconvinced, "you always were so weakly confiding. If you ever see your money again, I'll give you leave to—to—turn my best bonnet into a Vivarium." Aunt Patty's bursts of indignation never lasted very long, for hers was not a disposition to harbour resentment. She laid down the letter, and took off her spectacles, but her countenance still showed anxiety of mind. "It is a large sum," she

said, "and we cannot afford to lose money without feeling it."

"Never mind, old woman," said Uncle Rob soothingly, "there are worse misfortunes in the world than losing £500."

"Well, Uncle," said Bessie admiringly, "I never heard of any one who took a money loss so easily."

"Why," returned he, "it is not philosophical to allow such trifles to disturb one's mind."

"It is not the loss of the money," said Aunt Patty, firing up again, "that vexes me so, it is the base ingratitude and rascality of the man! To repay your confidence in such a manner! This is what puts me out of patience."

"Ah!" said Uncle Rob reflectively, "you should never be put out of patience, my dear. You see, Bess," he added, in a pretended aside, "what a thing it is to possess a masculine mind! Such minor matters have no power to upset its equilibrium; whereas your aunt, acting according to her feminine instincts, falls into fits, and abuses humanity right and left. Shakspeare must have had some such woman in his eye, when he described Hermia. 'She was a vixen when she

was at school, And though she is but little, she is fierce,' eh, my dear?" and he turned upon his traduced wife a glance at once quiz-zical and affectionate. "Now suppose I have lost £500; have I not succeeded in finding what no naturalist ever found on these coasts before—an Aphrodite eight inches and a half long?"

Bessie laughed, half amused, half admiring.

"Uncle," she said, "you remind me of the old woman who was thankful for small mercies."

"Eh, who? What old woman?"

"Don't you know the story?" said Bessie. "Once a gentleman went to see an old woman who had suffered a great many trials. She was a very pious old lady, and so he expected that she would display resignation and patience. But he was unprepared for the outburst of thankfulness which his sympathy elicited. 'Thank God,' said the old woman, 'I have lost my husband; I have lost my eldest son; I am bereaved of my youngest daughter; I am so troubled with rheumatics and ague that I can't sleep o' nights. But praise and bless His Holy Name! I have still two teeth left, and they are opposite each other.'"

"And a very wise old woman too," said Uncle Rob approvingly. "Teeth are mercies not to be despised, eh, Patty? You ought to be as thankful as this old lady, for you have at least as many teeth as she had, though you have not as yet had occasion to give thanks for the loss of your husband."

"For shame, my dear," she answered, endeavouring to look shocked and reproving; "you really turn everything into a joke."

"Heraclitus was a wiser man than his brother philosopher," said Uncle Rob, "and you will find that taking troubles cheerfully is the way to keep young, my dear. So take my advice, and don't grow old before your time." So saying, he rose from his chair, bestowed an affectionate pinch on the wife of his bosom, and, hammer in hand this time, set forth again to the rocks, in search of further marvels.

All unconscious of the battle that raged within doors, Basil and the two girls strolled on the beach. Tots looked peculiarly charming that morning. Her bloom had been something remarkable since they had been at the sea-side, and her eyes really were wonderfully bright. Within the last few days, Basil fancied she had improved, grown more ani-

mated and more generally cheerful. A few days ago her face had been often overcast with moodiness and discontent, and she had been ready to express a sensation of general boredom with all things. Now, however, she was bright and winning, as though her interests in all sea-side delights had suddenly revived. Basil cast longing looks at the sun-lit bay, more lovely, according to his taste, because it was covered with tiny waves whose minute foam-crests sparkled in the morning glow. He loved to be on it, exercising his strong arms in rowing, or sprawling idly at the bottom of the boat, enjoying the gratification of resting after exertion.

"Let me take you on the water to-day, Tots," he said, quite beseechingly: "I will go slowly if you like. Sophy would enjoy it, I am sure, and so would you, if you would but try."

But Tots was not to be persuaded, she had too vivid a recollection of her former experiences; and besides the water was by no means sufficiently calm to meet her views.

"Do come," urged Basil, and he took her arm, and tried to impel her gently towards the landing-stage, where the unoccupied boats bobbed invitingly up and down.

"Oh, no, Basil!" exclaimed the young lady, "I don't fancy it, really; the water looks so *joggety*! doesn't it, Sophy?"

"Only sufficiently so to be splendid," said Sophy enthusiastically. "I should so enjoy a row to-day."

"Try, Tots, for once," urged Basil, "if you cannot find as much satisfaction in pleasing others, as in pleasing yourself."

But Tots resented this view of the subject, and her resolution not to go was thereby confirmed.

"Anybody might think I was the most selfish person in the world, to hear you talk!" she said, in an injured tone; "Mr. Elwood would never have said such a rude thing. He, at least, knows how to be polite."

This remark she calculated would wither up Basil, and open his eyes to the enormity of his crimes.

"Mr. Elwood is a consummate ass," he returned, with an emphasis which showed he was anything but quenched.

"How can you be so narrow-minded?" said Tots, determining to show her betrothed that his character was far from faultless in her eyes; "you always condemn people for being polite and making themselves agree-

able; I believe you mistake roughness for a virtue, and consider it a crime to pay a compliment."

"Elwood *is* an ass," repeated Basil; not to be driven from his position by any female arguments. "Have not you the wit to see, Tots, that his head is as empty of brains as his conversation is void of common sense? What do you think, my little philosopher?" and he turned to Sophy, or rather to the place where Sophy had been, for she had vanished.

When she perceived that the lovers had begun to exchange arguments, it occurred to her that the safest way to preserve whole bones is to keep out of a quarrel. Therefore, not knowing but that arguments might lead to warmer and more personal remarks, she concluded to leave the pair to their fate, and enjoy herself in her own way, viz. in taking the portraits of a lady and gentleman sitting on the beach at some little distance in front of her, whose faces were consequently invisible, but in whose unconscious backs our artist found an infinite fund of suggestion. She fancied there was an air about these two as if they were mutually attracted, but far from thoughts of argumentation. They were

probably reading the same book, or eating the same bun, or engaged in some such innocent and delightful pastime.

As Sophy transferred the outline of this graceful pair to her sketch-book, she seemed gradually to recognize something familiar in the cut of the gentleman's back hair, and the sit of his straw hat. As she proceeded, the impression strengthened, yet she could not recall the name of the person suggested to her.

Presently he turned his head, so that for a moment she had a good view of his profile, and then her speculations were set at rest, by her perceiving that it was Saunders Onslow whose graceful little person had been the theme of her pencil. Undeterred by this consideration, however, she completed her sketch, and, by a natural transition from the contemplation of Saunders, her thoughts turned towards his brother. For some days Barnes had scarcely been seen. From visiting so often he had almost ceased to appear among them. And what made the matter still more surprising, neither Uncle Rob nor Aunt Patty ever alluded to his absence, or seemed at all astonished thereat. Sophy, after some pondering, came to the conclusion

that he was afraid of falling in love with Tots, and so thought it wisest to stay away. It did not seem to occur to her that there could be any attraction in any one else sufficient to cause a man to fall in love. The idea of Bessie, for instance, having an admirer never crossed Sophy's mind. Bessie did not seem to care about such things somehow, but as Tots did care about them very much, therefore plenty of them had fallen to her lot. "I think poor Barney is very wise to stay away," soliloquized Sophy. "I only wish that goose of a Mr. Elwood would do the same. I wonder," she thought, "if Tots only knew what a goose he is, whether she would go on letting him dangle about her. If I were Basil I would simply punch his head, and tell him to be gone about his business."

On the very evening of the day wherein Basil had conveyed his opinion of Mr. Elwood in such plain terms, the girls went out with him to stroll on the sands. Basil made himself very pleasant and amiable. He appeared resolved not to be put out with Tots, whatever might be her delinquencies, and he seemed to have altogether forgotten the little difference of the morning. He

talked, and drew upon his stores of information for her amusement; but he had no "small talk," no complimentary nothings, none of the qualities of conversation that Tots most liked. She therefore always found it difficult in his society to contribute her share, and she soon grew weary of endeavouring to keep up her attention, and frame suitable replies. Bessie and Sophy had dropped behind, and were occupied with their own subjects of interest; Sophy chattered and Bessie meditated, merely putting in an answering remark now and then, when her sister paused for her assent or otherwise. As the evening drew on, and the air became chilly, they, not being lovers, were uncomfortably conscious of such physical sensations as being cold and tired; so they left the sands and walked towards the house to join the home circle, which consisted of Aunt Patty and Uncle Rob. Tots was about to propose doing likewise, when she caught sight of Mr. Elwood making his way towards them, and she altered her intention in consequence. Basil perceived him also, and the idea of proposing to go home crossed his mind, but, in his generosity, he thought that the lady's wishes to that effect should first be

expressed. Mr. Elwood, who was not wanting in good manners, would have passed with a mere bow, but he was arrested by an inviting smile from Tots, who hailed his approach as a relief. He therefore stopped, observed that it was a beautiful evening, and took up his position on the other side of the lady. She who had before been taciturn, not to say dull, now seemed to wake up and sparkle into surprising brilliancy, and she forthwith commenced a bantering conversation with Mr. Elwood, who was deeply skilled in the same accomplishment. Basil stalked along in silence, for his refined taste was offended, and, moreover, he was growing angry.

It was very strange that Tots, who was almost silent in his company, even when he was doing his utmost to interest her, should thus flash into sprightliness in the society of one who had nothing to recommend him but a capacity for talking nonsense. He resolved at last to put an end to it, and signified to Tots that he wished her to return with him to the house.

"Not yet," she replied reluctantly, "it is not late."

"It is getting too damp for you," he

answered; "and—in short, Tots, I wish it."

The elegant Mr. Elwood slightly raised his handsome eyebrows, and then appeared suddenly absorbed in the perusal of the sands at his feet. Tots caught the momentary expression of sarcastic surprise, and her perverse spirit rose indignant at being thus peremptorily spoken to, and treated like a child, in his presence. He would laugh at her, she thought, if she allowed herself to be thus ordered about by Basil, so she answered shortly, "That it was still pleasant without doors, and that she did not intend to go in just yet."

The words, but still more her manner, were enough to provoke a more placid man than Basil. His face flushed ominously, but he controlled himself sufficiently to say nothing. As Tots turned with some indifferent remark to Mr. Elwood, as if to show how little she heeded the expression of her lover's wishes, he stalked abruptly away, leaving the two to continue their walk as long as they pleased. He did not go straight to the house, but strolled restlessly up and down in its vicinity, while the good people within were wondering what could be detaining the

truants. Half an hour passed, and yet Tots and her companion were not to be seen. However, Basil continued his walk, so that she could not pass into the house without his knowledge.

But it seemed at last as if his patience were quite worn out, for he turned slowly, and went up the steps, with a heavy and spiritless tread. Just as he was inside the front door, he heard Tots's voice at the gate. He turned and saw her, himself invisible. The pair, he noticed, lingered over saying good-night, and the process of hand-shaking appeared an unusually lengthy business.

At last Tots opened the gate, and Basil went slowly upstairs.

2

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2

1. The first step in the process of creating a new product is to identify a market need.

2. The next step is to develop a concept that addresses the identified need.

3. This is followed by a detailed design phase where the product's specifications are defined.

4. The fourth step is to create a prototype of the product.

5. The final step is to conduct a thorough testing and evaluation of the prototype.

6. Once the product is tested and approved, it can be moved into production.

7. The production phase involves manufacturing the product in large quantities.

8. The final step is to distribute the product to the market.

9. The distribution phase involves getting the product into the hands of the end user.

10. The final step is to monitor the product's performance in the market.

11. This involves gathering feedback from customers and making any necessary adjustments.

12. The final step is to evaluate the overall success of the product launch.

13. This involves analyzing sales data and customer feedback to determine the product's impact.

14. The final step is to plan for future product development based on the results.

15. This involves identifying areas for improvement and setting goals for the next product launch.

16. The final step is to celebrate the success of the product launch.

17. This involves recognizing the team's efforts and the product's contribution to the company's growth.

18. The final step is to document the product launch process for future reference.

19. This involves creating a comprehensive report that outlines the product's journey from concept to market.

20. The final step is to use the insights gained from the product launch to inform future business decisions.

21. This involves sharing the product launch story with stakeholders and the public.

22. The final step is to continue to monitor the product's performance and make any necessary adjustments.



